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A CENTURY OF FRENCH POETS

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A CENTURY OF FRENCH POETS

BEING A SELECTION ILLUSTRATING THE HISTORY OF FRENCH POETRY DURING THE LAST HUNDRED YEARS

With an Introduction, Biographical and Critical Notices of the Writers Represented, a Summary of the Rules of French Versification, and a Commentary, by

FRANCIS YVON ECCLES

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AU POÈTE

AUGUSTE ANGELLIER

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PREFACE

THIS book has been a long while making for a task not apparently so arduous. It was more than once laid down and taken up again, at long intervals, and no doubt the result on this account and others will show disparity and incoherence. My choice of French poetry was already settled—but for about a dozen pieces added since—when the very liberal Anthology of M. Walch, *Les Poètes Contemporains*, appeared, which with its supplementary volume, devoted to the earlier part of the last century, covers the whole of the same period. A good many of the poems I had selected may be read there; but I did not think it necessary to modify my list in consequence, because this is a compilation intended for English readers and accompanied by whatever I could offer as a help to their enjoyment.

Though a fair proportion of the very finest French verse written in the century, as far as I can judge, is included, there is so much else of interest coming far short of that superlative that I would rather call this a Chrestomathy (if the word were less pedantic) than an Anthology proper. My plan was to cull, among the works of some forty poets—not necessarily all the best, but each representing a phase in the later poetical development of France—such examples as should convey a just notion of their peculiar qualities and of their range. For this reason I have found no place for some better poets than Millevoye, Delavigne, Laprade and even Sully-Prudhomme; and I have passed by many

reputed masterpieces, not of course as soaring above the ordinary level of their authors, but because they did not appear to illustrate an authentic manner or to furnish a contributory type.

I hope this book, for all its defects, will be useful to serious students of French literature who may be glad to have in a single volume a body of verse exemplifying broadly the poetical variety of a teeming age; and also that it may help to correct a prejudice and to excite an interest among a larger class of English people who, however familiar with French fiction and memoirs, have somehow neglected the admirable poets of modern France. With very different sorts of readers in view, I have run the risk of taking now too much knowledge and now too much ignorance for granted. Many of the notes are rudimentary and some, I dare say, will be found irrelevant. As for the Introduction, I began it with the object of asserting, in a few paragraphs, the existence of a continuous and venerable French tradition in poetry, a rich patrimony which men of the nineteenth century have improved incalculably; but I soon found myself launched unawares upon a more formidable scheme of survey. The thing, I feel, is dull and disproportionate; it may strike others as superficial and pretentious also; and perhaps the necessity for condensation has betrayed me into an abuse of what is rather pompously called 'the allusive method.' But there are some definitions which may shorten the foreigner's approach to the heart of French poetry, and some confident judgments upon famous names which the general reader may be tempted at any rate to test—by turning to their works.

Both in the Introduction and the Commentary, as well as in the criticism appended to the notices on various poets, I have insisted a good deal upon versification; and I have

inserted a short account of measure, rime and rhythm in French poetry. If so much space allotted to a technical subject needs justifying, I can only say that nothing, to my mind, accounts so well for the poor reputation of French poetry in England as the assumption that (unlike the Greek and Latin) it can be approached and appreciated without the most distant notions of its prosody.

I wish to thank my friend Mr. Belloc for his advice, and above all for the kindly spur he has so insistently applied to this undertaking. The idea of the book, or of some such book, was his; and it is quite certain that it would never have got finished if his interest had not been proof against my laches.

F. Y. E

April 1909.

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AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF FRENCH POETRY

'THE French literature,' wrote the prince of English rhetoricians, glancing carelessly across the Channel in the year 1821, that marvellous year for English poetry—'the French literature is now in the last stage of phthisis, dotage, palsy, or whatever image will best express the most abject state of senile—(senile? no! of anile)—imbecility. Its constitution, as you well know, was in its best days marrowless and without nerve,—its youth without hope, and its manhood without dignity.'

Discharged in the visible dawn of a period incomparably fertile among the French in all the forms of imaginative writing, this volley of resonant claptrap would hardly be worth repeating merely to show a wide rent in the scholar's gown which De Quincey wore with so assured a grace, nor even because it would be difficult to meet in our language with a more forcible assertion of the common attitude towards the literature, and especially the poetry, of France. But it contains a shred of truth, which at its date was fresh and valuable. In the score of lean years with which the century opens, something that had been young, that had been ripe, and which had still the name of French literature allowed it, was lying parched and shrivelled upon its deathbed. To suppose that this gasping veteran, whose life had been artificially prolonged until it was become a burden, was the founder of his family, to miss the glimmer of a likeness on his dull, sunken features with a virile and imperishable race, is a more deplorable impertinence than to be confident he could have no such heir as the eager and reckless child in brave apparel, whose adventurous vigour, seeming to belie his birth, was to enhance so splendidly a half-forgotten lustre.

Great Frenchmen of the nineteenth century have often claimed a right to choose their ancestors; but the line is unbroken. Michelet's magnificent formula—'La France a fait la France'—is as profoundly true in letters as in politics: the development of French poetry, which particularly concerns us, has been continuous; not progressive in every sense, but continuous; there is not a link in the chain wanting. Where the stream of song rises no one knows—it may be followed for nine hundred years. As well might we date the beginnings of English History from the battle of Waterloo as suppose that the spirit of poetry was born in France when the long agony of classicism ended and the sons of Revolution woke the land with the sound of the horn in the woods at morning.

And yet, so absolute is the lyrical supremacy of the last age there that whatever was accomplished in that kind before might well seem only a prelude or a promise. Such an efflorescence, bursting the more suddenly at last for a long and secret saturation of the soil, is not to be explained: we only affirm it by saying that a few great men, and many exceptionally endowed, then gave their energies to poetry. For if the artistic aptitudes of a race and of its speech—the infallible reflexion of a race—are never permanently modified unless by conquest, it is the apparition of genius that from time to time reveals them fully. They are barren at moments of convulsion, in ages of extreme lassitude and of little men; in others fashion, the pride of perfect imitation, starving certain faculties to glut the rest, inflicts a onesided—at first sometimes a salutary—discipline upon the formal conditions of the effort to create.

But a dozen masterpieces would suffice to prove an abiding possibility.

I

The French have made poetry from the first, with the same instrument, with a conception of rhythm and harmony essentially unchanging—and the particular autonomy of so many temperaments and tones and aspirations only gives breadth and colour to the impression of unity which results

from their array. If we go back to the start of that long period in which all but the entire imaginative literature of Western Europe either belonged to them, or bore witness to the restlessness of their blood and the attraction of their delectable tongue, at the very gates of that age-long dominion we find the most constant moulds of French verse, with some constitutional virtues of French art, and the instincts and ideals to which this people is perpetually returning, already manifest in three anonymous poems composed, or re-composed, during the eleventh century—and that is full two hundred years before the land was welded into one polity again, and longer still before the idiom of the Royal Demesne had evicted its near neighbours of the *langue d'oïl*.[1] One is the humble and infinitely gracious life of Saint Alexis, which exalts without false pity, or a perfunctory word that would cheapen their price, the rare sacrifice of our affections to the service of God.[2] Another is the great epic of Christendom, the Song of Roland, of honour, of fraternity, and the pride of being few against a host and caring only 'that gentle France may take no shame through us.' In the third, called the Pilgrimage of Charlemagne to Jerusalem, which scholars place in time between these two, gleams the double edge of a native irony, half conscious, probing the glory of a caste and finding something hollow there—and with it appears that sovereign vehicle of French poetry, the Alexandrine.[3] They are diverse in origin, worlds apart in feeling —but remember that the same land was to produce both

[1] It is well known that French is the dialect of the Duchy of France, which only gradually established its pre-eminence over the Picard (with Walloon), the Champenois, the Burgundian (with the Lorrain between them), the Norman and the Poitevin—these last the two forms of French which made English what it is. *Oïl* (*hoc illud*) was 'yes' in them all, as *oc* was 'yes' in the dialects of Southern France which we call generically Provençal (Gascon, Limousin, Catalan and the speech of the old Roman Provincia).

[2] 'The impudence even of a Frenchman would not dare to connect the sanctities of religious feeling with any book in his language,' says De Quincey pleasantly in the same essay—as if he had never heard of François de Sales, of Bossuet, of *Polyeucte* or *Athalie* or even of Calvin's *Institution*!

[3] A century earlier than *Alixandre*, the popular epic of Lambert le Tors and Alexandre de Bernay which gave the verse its name.

Joan the warrior-saint and *La Pucelle,* the brilliant libel of Voltaire! They have all three in common a humanity which tends to neglect everything on earth but human life; a bias of interest that ever shuns the unsociable theme; a sane precision and tenacity of sensuous apprehension, reproducing each event in its real order and without method hitting the mark of a rigorous composition; that sort of probity which abhors inorganic ornament and clouds of speech, and forbids the irrelevant irruption of the dreamer into the tale of his dream; continuity, the instinct which sustains one pitch, one gait, and powerfully helps illusion;—and a rhythm above all, a rhythm clear, robust, and supple, that to this day commands the native voice.

The pomp and subtlety of the classical measures feebly perpetuated by the gaunt bookishness of cloisters, the dying echo of the swinging choruses (so much more Roman!) that the legionaries shouted on the solid roads, had mingled with indigenous relics, some stubborn obsession of the Gaulish ear, to cast and sanction younger forms. The language itself, with its scrupulous articulation, its habit of just equipoise and contempt for stresses that are not significant, not dictated by the mind,—its inward harmony, which relies on uniformity of movement towards an ideal point (fixed by a suspension of the sense or an anticipation of the ear), laid the foundations of their theory:—a tale of syllables which must be exact; in the long lines an interruption—and a respite for the voice—at a settled place where thoughts have converged with some intensity; another at the end to mark the measure; lastly, a recurrence of the final sounds.

The poems I have spoken of were stories, not what we call songs. *Saint Alexis*[1] was written and read; the others and the whole innumerable class of poems recording heroic feats, and afterwards adventures in love as well as war, were composed for recitation—in 'fyttes' containing (down to a certain period in the history of narrative poetry) a variable

[1] The poem is in assonance, not rime; but it is arranged in regular stanzas of five lines. Assonance is the repetition of a vowel-sound, rime the repetition of a vowel-sound and any consonant sounds that may follow.

number of lines strung together by the exact repetition of a vowel. It is a pedant's assumption that assonance is older than rime, and gradually became rime. Very likely they existed side by side, appropriated to distinct needs, from the first. Rime in French verse and assonance, if sometimes they have degenerated into toys, did not aim principally at a childish titillation of the ear: they were two ways of reinforcing in a language of variable accentuation that consciousness of a regular return without which verse, in Europe, is not verse. For compositions uniform in measure, in which the succession of yoked lines might be prolonged at the discretion (or according to the resources) of the poet, assonance, striking the ear so often, was enough: it was enough, besides, to sustain the minstrel's memory, while the difference of a tone perhaps in his monotonous psalmody, gave salience to the last strong syllable of each line. Rime, which we find developed at a date even earlier than that of *Saint Alexis* and the *Pilgrimage* in their definitive form,[1] may very well have been preferred, even at first, for lyrics in the proper sense.

What were the lyrics of this early time? Learned men can tell us. They have shown that in the heyday of epical creation, the French love-song, made (like the first epics) for the whole people, but the solace and delight especially of women, flourished all over the north. Little is left but names. From scarce fragments, from many burdens that have survived to grace the lyrics of later days, from the songs of other countries—Italy, Germany, Spain—on which French models then exercised an appreciable influence, it may be conjectured that the lyrical output in this first age was rich, of delicate workmanship, extremely varied in form, and not devoid of sincerity and tenderness, but not very personal, tending often to dramatise a scanty assortment of situations, and seldom or never reflecting the absorption or the spiritual violence of passion. For the love of woman

[1] The fragment of an *Alixandre* by Alberic de Besançon (eleventh century) is in stanzas of octosyllables which unquestionably are intended to rime, and generally do.

that fills a life, that feeds upon itself, the communion of predestined souls, the subtle draught which turns to ecstasy or madness, we must look to the narrative poems of the next age, that violent youth of stone-building Europe which fell to musing for a while on Celtic visions of the world and the strange beauty of their Pagan symbols, and sometimes (as in French versions of *Tristan and Isolt*)[1] made them seem its own. The phase was short: French art took what it could assimilate, and rejected the rest. Neither its fundamental lucidity, its rude health, nor its conception of inanimate nature as above all a source of metaphors, was modified by contact with kindred but less disciplined peoples.

A more dangerous infection came from the South, which the Crusades and the two Courts of Queen Eleanor[2] revealed in its seductive radiance and nimbleness to the hard-living nobles of Maine and Anjou, Picardy and England. While the feudal idea froze and became mechanical and barren, and what had been the national epic turned gradually to heartless spinning of wonders and compliant genealogies, the French lyric, steeped in the refinement of Provence and Aquitaine, lent itself humbly to the elaborate rhetoric, the shallow multiplicity of trifling variations, all the erotic and oftener Platonic casuistry of the troubadours. It was a period of essential triviality out of which, however, French verse was to emerge more agile and more buoyant, able therefore to carry, later on, a more solid cargo with the better grace. Among the courtly poets a few names (Blondel, Conon de Béthune, King Tybalt of Navarre, Gace Bruslé) have floated down to us, the names of diligent craftsmen, inexhaustible weavers of rimes and riddles;—for their appeal, superficially to the senses, is really to an intellectual

[1] Béroul's, and that of Thomas (an Anglo-French poem), are the best known: neither is complete. We have lost the *Tristan* of Chrétien de Troyes, the most famous of those *trouvères* who treated by preference 'la matière de Bretagne'—a prolix and minute narrator, but a delicate maker of verse.

[2] Eleanor of Aquitaine (heiress of a line of twelve great counts) divorced from King Lewis the Seventh, married our Henry III. and brought him most of the west of France as a dowry. Her daughters were the Countesses of Champagne and of Blois, both brilliant patronesses of the courtly poets.

acuteness that has patience for the formalism of hypothetical passions. And the dependence of gallantry upon dialectic at this period is illustrated even by a poem apparently so distant in its inspiration from the mellifluous debates of courtly triflers as the famous *Romaunt of the Rose.* Guillaume de Lorris intends his part (the better) in that prodigious allegory for a pleasant manual of the amorous code, while in fact he draws his matter, the interplay of abstractions which his robust and delicate talent often contrives to colour with life, from the psychology of the schools.

It marks the shifting of poetical interest from castles to walled towns, that Jean de Meung, his verbose and encyclopædic successor, whose virtue consists in his irrelevance, should have addressed a public accustomed to misogynous diatribes and the abuse of idle magnates and covetous monks. Not the courts, indeed, but cities where the mental energy of the race accumulated, supply the rare oases in a great waste of insignificance. Arras, in the busy, fertile and quarrelsome North, could boast of Jean Bodel, a man of parts who tried his hand at every sort of writing, Adam le Bossu or Adam de la Hale, the hardly less versatile author of *Robin et Marion*, which is a lyrical diversion of prime quality cast in dialogue. And a far greater man than either, Rutebeuf, is a Parisian from Champagne. Rutebeuf, a master of deep and sounding satire who saw the seamy side of Saint Lewis's reign, an artist who commanded the resources of a language still in flux, used rime unfalteringly and invented durable measures, may be called the first excellent French poet whose name we possess; the first at least who made poetry with his heart, out of his faith, his failures and follies, and pity for himself and all the world. A sort of minstrel by trade, dependent on the great who were even then tiring of their fine-spun amorists, and forced sometimes to hire out his real piety to their compunctions (if it is true that *Théophile*, a masterpiece of the religious drama, and the admirable life of S. Mary of Egypt, were written for patrons), he is the earliest articulate type of the literary proletariat in Paris. Unclassed, he had something for all the classes in the realm. His code

is chivalrous, his vision mystical; but by his rich laugh, his grasp on palpable realities and turn for moralising, he adheres to the 'burgess literature,' and is near its favourite purveyors—the chroniclers of Reynard the Fox, the authors of the Fabliaux,[1] who had never a Boccaccio nor a Chaucer among them (though in a sense both spring from them), but who, besides standing at the head of a fine tradition, and expressing in the frank irreverence of their salted imaginations something elemental in the national temper, do now and again attain the perfection of narrative by the thrift and haste and vivacity of their speech.

Rutebeuf in the thirteenth century beacons to François Villon in the fifteenth, with only the flicker of sundry rush-lights searching the gloomy tract between them, except where, close behind Villon but just off the spiritual highway, Duke Charles of Orleans irradiates the sum of many nothings with a retrospective glow. With the long list of versifiers who bear witness to the decomposition of mediæval society, the science of language and the history of manners are principally concerned: their best perhaps might furnish out a score of pages that should contain only deft and pointed and melodious lines. It is enough to name Guillaume de Machaut, who could play the perfect suitor according to ancestral rules, but is reputed for having inaugurated the new manner consisting in an exact replenishment of rhythmical honeycombs from a store of indifferent words; Froissart, as empty and graceful in rime as he is rough and pithy in prose; Eustache des Champs, so grave, abundant and sententious; the pettifogging Coquillart, Alain Chartier whom a queen kissed and his compeers valued for learning and prudent counsel, and Christine de Pisan, an amiable bluestocking and excellent Frenchwoman in spite of her Italian birth. For all these and their satellites, and all their line, the Meschinots and Molinets and Cretins, which lasted well into the sixteenth century, the great affair apparently was to deliver poetry from the scandal of frivolity

[1] It is hopeless to try to restore the real French form of the word *fableau*, which the dialectical *fabliau* has long since ousted.

and the reproach of being easy. In general they are more sincere than the courtiers before them, in so far as their matter is of larger—sometimes indeed of national—interest. Prodigal of fine bookish maxims as their predecessors were full of precious sentiments, several of them display the genuine though confused and patchy erudition achieved with an abortive revival of learning under the elder Valois. They are disputatious and didactic, in an age when vernacular prose already offered a more effective vehicle for wisdom and enquiry. They are hypnotised by the example of sustained personifications left by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meung: visions and allegories are an indispensable part of their stock-in-trade. As for their form, they have exchanged the sane if often childish joy in free invention for the pride of a complicated framework—the bare ribs of a starved and juiceless poetry.

Tradition is a slippery word: but it is doing no injustice to Charles of Orleans, the ineffectual hope of a national royalty, the not inconsolable prisoner of Windsor and Groombridge, and a prince, when all is said, too suave and too placable for honour, to describe his work and influence, which deviate from the larger destinies of French literature, as a return essentially to the refined tradition of the twelfth and thirteenth conturies. To be sure he is a master of the fixed forms elaborated by more recent generations, and three quarters of his matter is an analysis of fashionable metaphor, a perfunctory attempt to galvanise the soulless abstractions which fascinated his times. But he is no preacher, his subtleties are all sentimental, his verbal conscientiousness revolts against the servile excellence accessible to the machinery of iteration, and in a word his work is aristocratic in the most familiar sense. What is entirely his own is the fluid sweetness, the disencumbered gait, the *nonchaloir* which history reads tragically, a delicious language, unpedantic, personal in its novelties and archaisms, and so perfectly apt to evoke the fugitive vision of happy glades and silver brooks—but especially his fortunate gift of lighting upon themes to which their very echo lends an

adventitious value, the illusion of a melancholy meaning. Remembering that his mother was a Visconti of Milan, and that his son was to lead a French host into Italy, we think of him too readily as a precursor of the French Renaissance. He is much more truly, by virtue of his lovable shallowness, detachment and vague, fanciful gallantry, the last of the feudal patron-poets, and assuredly the worthiest. After him the Southern fever, which had survived the lancet of the Albigensian wars, made no more distinguished efforts, in the guise of chivalry, to capture the national genius.

Villon may very probably have been an occasional client of the Duke's. Why does he seem not thirty or forty, but hundreds of years nearer to us? Because, for one thing, he was so much more frankly the child of his own moment, engrossed by the actuality of fugitive, intensely real impressions, and alive through them. In the lurid twilight into which he was born, to hob and nob with death had a delirious fascination for the haggard fancy of men; and even the sane and lusty spirit of this wastrel, tramp, chamberer and cut-throat riming under the shadow of the scaffold, was harried by churchyard thoughts and haunted with the palpable image of decay, so that his verse, for all its vitality and fragrance, shares the sinister obsession of a hopeless people, tossed between hunger and pestilence and guile and rapine. He transcends it: the peculiar resonance Villon lends to the natural man's outcry at the menace of decrepitude and extinction, is not merely an effect of the precision with which his exasperated senses perceive their very horror: his certitude of the common doom is the more acute for the yearnings of a wistful imagination excited by illustrious names and condemned to feed on its own hunger. 'Et mourut Paris et Hélène. . . .' Their place knows them no more. Where are Flora and stout Charlemagne?[1] The

[1] Villon knew well enough *where*. If what follows seems a little fanciful, what shall be said of those who insist on reading the rhetorical question in the famous Ballade as a sort of confession of unfaith? The poet, like everybody else, believed in heaven, hell, purgatory and limbo: he would hardly otherwise have addressed his dubiety to the Mother of God: '*où sont-els, Vierge souveraine?*'

bodies of exquisite women and valiant men have made the passage we must make. And Villon, while he revives one of the eternal commonplaces of all poetry, touches for the first time that modern chord of a nostalgic regret for the antiquity of the ancients, and because the past is past.

The man was an imperfect artist, writing disjointedly, using a hieratic framework, mixing the gross and the grotesque with the poignant everywhere. But his power to express himself once and for all is equal to the new and extreme exigencies of a boundless candour. Of one French measure at least, the ancient octosyllable, he discovered for himself all the deep resources; and whoever compares the *Grant Testament* with Hugo's *Songs of the Streets and the Woods* will grant that the virtuosity of the modern master goes no further than Villon's in varying the speed and shifting the pauses. He knew also the need of varying the pace of thought, the value of alternate leisureliness and density. He is the first French poet with whom imagery, the giving a sensuous form to ideas, is spontaneous and not a device of rhetoric. Finally none had possessed before him that sure sense of the prestige of words, and perpetual spring of verbal invention, of which perhaps it is a condition that the speech shall be already venerable, and still changing rapidly.

For us, Villon is both the capital figure among the elder poets of his race, and the head of an illustrious line: for his contemporaries he was a disreputable exception. His comrades and successors, the canting rhymsters of the 'repues franches,' were only capable of repeating the trivial accessories of his personal and lonely song; and the considerable interval between his day and Marot's is filled with the turgid emptiness of an effete chivalry, the slender versified garrulity of selfish and earthly-minded citizens. Meantime the nation slowly shook off its nightmare, and its fits of falling sickness were followed by the distemper of a second adolescence. The desire of knowledge was rekindled in men of books; Burgundy, spared by alliance with the English invaders, had kept alive the tradition of an indigenous manner in sculpture and painting, and now transmitted beyond her borders

the secret of a deliberate grace of line, an Attic sobriety and luminous decision of gesture which are the household virtues of the Primitifs; in Burgundy too, and Artois and Picardy and the Walloon country, music was born again; the Paris students learned Greek; French farce, in this the age of decadence for the grave religious drama, gave its masterpieces to holiday crowds in the great cities; French prose was acquiring coherence, proportions and ductility, and the spoils of Roman eloquence had fairly begun to fill the gaps of language which a larger way of living and thinking made apparent. But in the midst of this native ferment there was an almost absolute stagnation of French poetry, gravelled by fashion and authority. Men were still wanting; and when men came who dared confide in the vigour of their temperaments, yet skilful and scrupulous to give a durable form to their impressions and reflexions, a mighty impulse from without had in some sort diverted the stream.

II

The revival of learning in France began without Italian intervention and, before it affected at all profoundly the currents of the French literature, it was become a European thing, and the apocalypse of a scholar's paradise had lit up all the West. It is true that, when French artists went to school to the ancients, they saw the paragon of docility in a living people; and it is at least a colourable opinion that, at the Renaissance, the infant arts of France were strangled by the silken cords of a foreign enchantress. Yet it is certain that poetry, at any rate, lay bemused; the best hope of its awakening was in the general spirit of expectancy and restlessness; and it was precisely an effect of that spirit which brought the warlike part of the nation, the most alert and the best able to determine a change of direction in art and in the arts of life, into immediate contact with the sudden and versatile genius of Italy, at a moment when all the adornments of a delicate prosperity were doing homage to the memories of her ancient pride refreshed. And, for a

little, the sunlight dazzled the northern eyes: at a nod of the heiress, all the Gothic past seemed to be violently cancelled.

The continuity of the French prose literature was rescued by the prodigious diversity and freedom of Rabelais, who touches Commynes with one elbow and Amyot and Montaigne with the other. In verse Clément Marot is a frail link between the starkness of Villon and the reasoned force of the French classics. Yet it may be said that if divine tempests of passion had raged within him and the fire of his imagination had been greater instead of less than his ease and his delight in melting syllables, the French lyric might never have swerved from its straight course, thanks to the steadiness of his example; for (though he fought for King Francis beyond the Alps) he is very little Italianate, and his substantial qualities are all homely. Fortune made Marot the poet of a court tinged with an alien politeness; where the adulterate valour of a windy Amadis passed for the mirror of Frankish heroism; but where also, for the first time, there was a zest for prompt and lively talk. He sprang from those *rhétoriqueurs* who had amused the solemn leisure of Queen Anne of Brittany; but, somehow, he escaped their pedantry. He used a succulent and hearty speech, loved and 'emended' Villon, and while reflecting the idle humours of a domesticated baronage, and even while playing (to his disgrace and danger) with the edged tools of fashionable dissent, kept the tone of a sober looker-on, and held uppermost all the while that Gaulish joviality and bantering prudence which are the lining, as it were, of the French gravity and rashness. The old national fabulists live again in him, and for Voiture and La Fontaine, for Régnier and Molière, for Gresset too and Voltaire, he incarnated what was best worth preserving, or what could still be understood, in the spirit of the sixteenth century, which to more modern eyes he represents so meagrely. His ear was nice, he had an ingenuous grace, rapidity and buoyancy in telling a plain story, a sound idea of being perspicuous and terse; and if the lyric sense be denied him because his

temperament was sober and his soul essentially frivolous, then let Martial and Herrick and Anacreon and Prior be called no true poets.[1]

We come to what is more characteristic—the generous adventure of the Pleiad,[2] and the glory of Ronsard. That splendid episode produced in France a richer, ampler and more delightful poetry than any the Middle Ages had conceived; yet it was an episode in some degree unfortunate for the lyrical development. By their precipitate attempt to rival Greece and Rome with a monument of verse reared in a day upon their models, the heroes of the French Renaissance gave a singular bias to their art; and the succeeding age, in which the discipline of antiquity was accepted mainly through its affinities with the native intelligence, and its example scrupulously accommodated to the wants of the French genius, avenged too cruelly upon the lyrical idea that debauch of an unsociable enthusiasm.

The enterprise which Pierre de Ronsard, weaned by a merciful infirmity from the life of courts and reading Greek under Daurat at the Collège de Coqueret, confided to his comrade Baïf; the hope the pensive Du Bellay cherished in well-watered Anjou, and proclaimed in his spirited *Deffense et Illustration de la Langue françoyse*, was the conception of an exalted patriotism—nothing less than to endow their country with a fame in letters comparable to the fame of the ancient Republics and of living Italy. Full of Pindar and Horace and Petrarch, they had confidence not alone in

[1] 'The French Poete Marot (if he be worthy of the name of a poete)' is Spenser's expression: but Spenser by his close relations with the Pleiad—he translated Du Bellay and imitated Baïf—was committed to the disparagement of the elder writer.

[2] The school, in its first militant phase, was called 'La Brigade.' The seven stars of the poetical firmament were Ronsard and Antoine de Baïf; then Joachim du Bellay; Jodelle, the tragic poet; Remy Belleau, Jean Daurat (Auratus) the Hellenist, and Pontus de Thyard of Lyons. I have omitted purposely all reference to the relations (still in dispute) between the Pleiad and the Lyonnese Platonists—Maurice Scève, the overrated Louise Labé, and their group. The influence of the Pleiad upon the lyrical poets of the English Renaissance has recently been recognised by English criticism.

the efficacity of their learning and the strength of their own vocation, but in the magnanimity of their race and the aptitude of their mother tongue. Pedants might aspire to emulate the athletic accomplishments of Secundus and Sannazar, and allege the poverty of French to excuse their slothful prejudice. The old Roman writers, instead of using Greek in despair at the inadequacy of Latin for certain purposes of literature, had deliberately forged for themselves a worthier instrument by analogy with the Greek. It was for French poets to enrich French similarly. Neither Du Bellay nor Ronsard himself recommended an arbitrary multiplication of words: their theory of coinage was cautious enough, and their practice in many cases fortunate. But they erred by taking the indigence of the language too readily for granted, as if, because Marot's talent was content with a few words, it was the want of words that had straitened it. And if it was inevitable, and in a measure salutary, at this stage, that the language should be crammed with more ink-horn elements than it could possibly digest, certainly the poets of the Pleiad were tempted to prolixity by the very abundance of their material, and, what is worse, their example spread the mischievous superstition of synonyms, and the heresy of a distinct poetical vocabulary.

Time has approved at almost every point Ronsard's treatment of the national prosody. He left it to Antoine de Baïf to make abortive experiments with quantitative verse: his own precepts, so far from being revolutionary, did little more than define and sanction the better practice of his immediate predecessors. Thus, he forbade certain laxities of rime and deprecated the cacophonous clash of vowels, settled the alternation of masculine and feminine endings, decreed the elision of a mute following a sonorous vowel, and insisted on closing the half line with a strong syllable in the Alexandrine, which it is one of his notable achievements to have restored—especially in lyrical strophes of various measures—to the place of honour it had lost since Rutebeuf. It is true the Alexandrine of the Pleiad had not yet acquired the stability of a real unit; a certain envy of

the Virgilian amplitude fretting at the limits of a measure numerically shorter than the hexameter, and of which the rhythmical elasticity was still to discover, may account for the frequent overflow of Ronsard's periods, which too often efface the terminal accent to emphasise the bisection of the line. And his choice of the short-breathed decasyllable for his unlucky epic *La Franciade*, shows clearly enough how little he had divined the resources and the dignity of that magnificent type. But without him would the Alexandrine have survived at all?

Ronsard is the author of the French ode—of the name and of the thing. Allured at first by the Pindaric divisions, strophe and antistrophe and epode, he came to see the futility of those appellations, and retained only the essential conception of one poem with several parts converging to a climax. He is a great master of movement. The very notions of design, structure, composition, were new to his contemporaries, and for the first time the French lyric gained noble proportions in his hands. A sounder knowledge of mediæval poetry has reduced the number of structural inventions which can be ascribed to Ronsard—and still he remains the most fertile inventor in the whole history of French poetry. He gave the name of Ode only to his longer lyrics, high of purpose, mainly objective in theme and essentially religious in tone and feeling: in reality most of the love-poems, the small delicate masterpieces on which his fame now rests, are also Odes. It is in these that his ardent and fastidious personality is most clearly expressed. In these especially he invokes the companionship of the inanimate, and ransacks earth and heaven for fair similitudes. There he confides most constantly in his own nature, and relents a little from the disastrous habit of mythological allusions, in which no doubt a superstitious reverence for antiquity is involved, but which also presents the exceptional case (André Chénier's is perhaps the only French parallel) of a Christian imagination really peopled with pagan forms by the force of a sympathetic assimilation.

The brevity of life, and the moral ancient poets drew from it—the urgency of filling the fugitive moments with our essential selves—is one of his characteristic themes. Another, its counterpart and complement, is the impotence of envious time. No poet can ever have carried with him a more absorbing ideal of fame than Ronsard. Queens and cardinals and (what was more to him) his peers and scholars promised him immortality: but for him, as for Milton, the glory of which he felt serenely sure was mystical, independent of all praise. Without false shame, he sang of it constantly, thinking less of his own person than of his illustrious tribe. For it is this after all which, more than his positive achievement, makes Ronsard stand out among the poets of France—that he lifted his art, once and for all, out of the domesticity in which it languished, and proclaimed the poet his own tyrant, with a royal conscience to guard and govern his inspiration. In his view facility and servility were one: hence his disdain for Marot's unstudied lightness, the milk-and-honey of Saint-Gelais, the laureate of a chivalrous revival—though he could be just to both upon occasion: hence too, in part, his deliberate rejection of those pleasant toys, *ballades*, *rondeaux*, *chants royaux*, which threatened the freedom and the seriousness of poets with their quaint rigidity.

Instead of these he brought into French poetry the real kinds—or what seemed such—into which the Greeks and Romans had distributed all metrical composition, only excepting the Italian sonnet from his proscription of 'fixed forms.' He aspired to universal prowess, and Victor Hugo alone, of all French poets, can be said to have succeeded in such diverse undertakings as Ronsard. He failed disastrously with his *Franciade*, partly because he wanted the genius of sustained narration, partly because he had not access to the genuine matter of French epic and was easily seduced by the prestige of a bookish argument. But love, landscape and the praise of noble men are not all the stuff of Ronsard's finest work: he shared the public solicitude, and (not to speak of the famous ode to Michel

de L'Hôpital) his *Discours* are among the loftiest and the sagest appeals for humanity and concord that issued from the national side in the religious struggles.

His towering figure dwarfs his comrades—Du Bellay, the tender and spontaneous elegiac with a vein of satire, and a master of the sonnet; Remy Belleau, an exquisite craftsman; the learned Baïf, the philosophical Pontus de Thyard; Étienne Jodelle, who inaugurated French tragedy, but a better poet than dramatist. Their aims were Ronsard's: they had little of his force; nothing majestic in their defiance of sobriety blinds us to the fundamental weakness of the school. And when a generation has passed, and Desportes appears, sugared and precious, there is an end of high ambitions, and the fester of Italianism lies open. Those Danaan gifts of the Renaissance, the curiosity of life and the theory of beauty, came charged with dangers for the poise of the French mind. It had not to acquire the notion of humanity, and the new learning diffused through Christendom furnished that notion with a store of concrete applications to a distant age and other races, so like and so unlike us. But Italy had set up an equivocal ideal of the *homo maxime homo*, and the universal man was conceived not as a norm but as a rarity; by her example that craving to multiply the particular existence which is the principle of artistic effort as of most other activities confounded art with accomplishments and aristocracy with vocation. It was a gain to French poetry that æsthetic emotion should be perceived as the specific criterion of perfect work, that form should be recognised as logically distinct from matter, and the legitimate object of a method deducible from the study of great models: to mistake a logical for a real distinction and adopt the Transalpine 'indifference to the content' was, for the lesser disciples of Ronsard, to condemn themselves to laborious sterility or histrionic postures.

If Desportes, by his mannered prettiness and conceits and obscurity, accentuates the original vice of a brilliant school, there are two poets somewhat loosely adhering to it

in the next generation whose virile temperaments found expression in unexampled works. Agrippa d'Aubigné, a Huguenot captain, wrote voluminously both prose and verse, in the intervals of fighting for religious freedom and the dismemberment of his country; his humorous *Faeneste* is forgotten, but the fame of *Les Tragicques* has (almost in our times) revived. The poem belongs to the fiercest period of the civil wars, though it was not published before the first years of the seventeenth century, which saw the final ruin of the protestant feudalism. It is long, loosely constructed, tedious in parts; d'Aubigné's Alexandrine is, like Ronsard's, a shifting entity; and there are quagmires of finical phrase in the masterpiece, which remind his readers that the old fanatic had served his poetical apprenticeship as a purveyor of gallantries. But the rhythm has a prodigious energy, the vivid scenes of conspiracy and slaughter burn our eyes as we read, the comminatory parts are pitched in a key of Hebraical solemnity: *Les Tragicques* is a monument of lyrical satire which stood alone in the language until the exile of Victor Hugo produced *Les Châtiments*, and is hardly to be matched in ours for the sonorous vehemence of its invective, though we have Milton's thunderous verse and scurrilous prose, and the sardonical fury of *Absalom and Achitophel*.

Mathurin Régnier is a satirist of another sort. His erudition—for he knew the Romans by heart—and his colour bind him to the Pleiad: his racy freshness, zest, agility, the conspicuous power in him of seeming simple, and the continual surprise of an expression startlingly right, carry us back not merely to Marot but to Villon too. Molière inherited his vein and his diction, and the prose of Saint-Simon more than a hundred years later had the same vivacity and savour in a similar enterprise. This scandalous churchman (he was incorrigibly profligate) chastised folly without zeal, by the malice of keen senses and the tenacity of a sensuous memory which revived the very looks and tones and gestures of men, but also by the

integrating force of an intelligence which could gather into types the particular bugbears of his sane humanity.

It was perhaps as the nephew of Desportes that Régnier felt obliged to break a lance with the implacable critic of his relative, by way of defending the fame of Ronsard: in any case it was a strange and deplorable confusion of issues which pitted so national a talent against the man who did more than any one else to consummate a national reformation in the matter of poetry.

François de Malherbe was a Norman gentleman who spent his life in hard campaigning of one sort or another: in youth he drew the sword for his faith and the integrity of the kingdom, and ended as the champion of the French idiom in its purity, and of the literary conscience. He wrote a very few thousand lines of verse; and of that little some is in the worst taste of the times, stilted and decorative and grossly Italianate. How he was converted is not known, but in middle age, or rather later, he formed a new manner, from which conceits are not entirely absent, but which is in the main the perfect model of sententious eloquence. There was no exuberance in his talent: half a dozen topics, chosen for their common interest and developed broadly, in concise and solid formulas, sufficed him; and he took only a few, and the most compact and sober, of Ronsard's strophes for his moulds. With these, and the grave and confident tone of a robust frankness, a reasonable stoicism, he achieved two or three masterpieces which teach the meaning of orderly and true expression. But his precepts, formal and informal, were even more valuable than his example. They result from an intolerant contempt for waste material, and a conception eminently social of his art. The chaotic affluence of Ronsard's vocabulary did not charm him: it wanted a standard, and it provoked redundance. He tilted against the Gascon brogue of King Henry's court, and referred a dispute over a common word to the porters of the hay-market, thus signifying his confidence in the usage of the *Parisis*, that cradle of the language. He sought to restore its gristle

by an extreme condensation, that is, by requiring that not a syllable should be used for ornament, but that a man should set down only what he meant. Malherbe was not insensible to the sonorous virtues of speech, but he understood by harmony a continual propriety of expression, and a connection of parts which the reason can appreciate. To eliminate caprice and chasten personality seemed to him a necessary aim of the poetical discipline. He never thought of poetry as anything else but a form of talk invested with a traditional prestige, by which the particular mind translates for the general the accumulated sagacity of ages. But he laboured to make it as definite a form as possible, and that is the whole gist of his riders upon the prosodical legislation of the Pleiad—that the voice should halt where the sense is consummated, and that rime should be always strenuous, never slovenly. In striving to impose these principles, he took for his models those of the Romans whose accent is most reasonable and whose labour is most cunning; but it may be said of him that through the Romans he discovered virtues latent in the national literature, though already manifest in French building: economy, balance, a clearness which is not only (like plain English) practical, but logical also, and exacts an evident, a definite relation of units in a group; but especially the adjustment of proportions to the human scale.

The development of the classical ideal in French art and principally in letters was the work of no single intelligence. Ronsard, it has been said justly, belongs to the prehistoric age of classicism, the age of individual experiment. Malherbe did all one man could do half consciously to conciliate the aesthetic scruple, the breadth and serious enthusiasms of the sixteenth century, its learning and luxurious disdain, with those gregarious instincts, that sobriety and aversion to whatever is esoteric and disorderly, that preference of discourse over ejaculation, which are the perpetual guardians of the French tradition. Descartes, after him, presents truth not as a professional pursuit, but as the object of our

common reason, and lays the foundation of a psychology which is to be the occupation of a century. The elder Balzac takes up French prose at the point where Montaigne had left it, and gives it equality and cadence. Vaugelas, the grammarian from Savoy, reveals that sort of purity in the form of words and structure of phrase which only a passionate attachment to idiom can attain. But in the formation of a national taste not inferior to the masterpieces of the century, French society itself—a recent thing—directly co-operated. There was indeed a stage when those celebrated gatherings at the Hôtel de Rambouillet and other great houses threatened to frustrate, or at least pervert, the enterprise of Malherbe. When fine ladies leagued with professed wits undertook to humanise the fierce energy of a rude, full-blooded, turbulent nobility disused to all the graces by the civil wars, it is no wonder they overshot the mark of the urbane in their terror of boorishness and insulsity. It was at first an intercourse of violent natures newly ambitious to assert themselves in a spiritual sphere, and ready to lend the exaggerated importance of a contest to everything spoken: there was no room for pointless talk; and periphrastical inventions became at once a protest against crudity, the jargon of a caste, and the opportunity of a vehement egoism transplanted from camps and cabinets to drawing-rooms and bedsides. Delight in verbalisms, and a rage for recondite allusions and allegorical politeness were fostered by the vogue of a new Italianism which set in with the brilliant pastorals of Marino and Guarini, and complicated by a very superficially Spanish strain of strutting and fantastical extravagance. Malherbe himself did not quite escape these modish taints; nor later did the magnificent Corneille. They were not (any more than our Euphuists, our 'metaphysical school' of poetry) symptoms of a decadence, but on the contrary the accidents of an effort, which at last succeeded, to soften the manners of a robustious generation. The settlement of the kingdom, the disgrace of a clique, a general reaction against the exotic, the widening of French society, are some of the

obvious causes which gradually threw off the poison of a tortured manner, the manner of *Astraea* and the *Pastor Fido*, and prepared a saner public to laugh with Molière at the provincial counterfeit of Parisian affectations, and at the pestilent female pedantry which appeared afterwards as a by-blow of the same spirit. But this must be remembered to the credit of the *précieuses*, that their aims, the constitution of a cultivated nucleus, the purgation of the language by the test of usage rather than by the tyranny of pedagogues, were infinitely respectable; and that it is in great measure owing to their intervention that in the age in which the French mind yielded not absolutely its greatest, but assuredly its most original contribution to European letters, the tone of discourse, civil, unstilted and conciliatory, prevailed; and that from then till now the relation of the written to the spoken language has, upon the whole, been constantly closer than in the case of any other modern idiom.

The lessons of Malherbe anticipated the consolidation of a fastidious public, secured against the charms of an excessive personal adventure in poetry by the ascertainment of its true intellectual bench-marks. But, in the first half of the seventeenth century, the immediate influence of society upon lyricism was almost entirely pernicious. There were men of talent among the 'bedside poets': Vincent Voiture, the spoilt child of a sphere above his birth, displays here and there an amplitude worthy of a higher ambition than to be the most facile, the most 'natural' model of an artificial style; Sarrazin's witty triolets have an inimitable finish; the trifling fancy of Benserade is often exquisite. But neither they, nor Théophile de Viau nor Saint-Amant —two writers who had certainly a spark of genius, and by no means depended upon the humours of fashion for their themes, however disastrously both were in different ways contaminated by its jargon—are of a calibre to make any one regret the victory of reason over temperament. Théophile, a loose liver and loose talker caught, perhaps unjustly, in the web of heresy, possessed what Malherbe wanted—a

teeming invention, spontaneity, a rich (and not impure) vocabulary; and such of his serious pieces as the Epistle written in exile to King Lewis the Thirteenth and the Odes against Winter and to Solitude show him capable of an impressive sincerity. Saint-Amant, a pensioner of queens and one of the hardest drinkers of his time, wrote plentifully and most unequally, but with extraordinary mastery of rime, variety, and power of sensuous presentment. A sneer of Boileau's turned his heroical *Moïse Sauvé* into a byword for inflation and absurdity: it is a poor epic, wanting enthusiasm, coherence, simplicity; yet it contains many passages of indisputable grace and vigour; and among the shorter poems of Saint-Amant several are remarkable for the full flavour and extreme vitality and faithfulness of the descriptions, a sensitive ponderation of sounds, a delightful comic sense and abundance of unused metaphors. But in Théophile and Saint-Amant alike the artistic outlay is too often disproportionate to the occasion, details are too conspicuous in a hazy plan; and they paid especially too heavy a concession to the imported taste for bombastic mannerism, strained figures, and the frivolous equivocations our Cowley called 'jests for Dutch men and English boys,' to deserve any credit for having vindicated the rights of subjective inspiration against an 'art made tongue-ty'd by authority.'

Meanwhile Maynard, Malherbe's best scholar, who left some fine examples of a Roman gravity and chastity of form, vainly denounced the idols of his contemporaries; and if the soldier dilettante Racan (to whom we owe the valuable life of Malherbe) had less reason to complain of an ungrateful public, it was doubtless the conventional mundane form of his dramatic idylls—*bergeries*—which captured attention, rather than the odes and sonnets in which he approved his discipleship—a real discipleship, however obscured by the vagaries of a mutinous negligence, which his happy gift was genuine enough in small undertakings to afford. The definite acceptance of ideals which inevitably sacrificed some lyrical sources to the common interests of literature, was delayed even after Corneille, whose voice is often the voice

of a Malherbe less jejune and more aspiring, fixed with his politic masterpieces the characteristic type of French tragedy —a crisis of issues all moral, all internal, in natures soberly differenced from the race, a crisis provoked by the simplest and fewest outward agencies and compressed within the straitest bounds of space and time and logical progression.

III

In the brief Augustan period[1] a nice and spontaneous compromise almost effaced the eternal antagonism between the world of poets and the world outside them, by the free acceptance of conventional limits on one side and on the other by an unique alertness of the imaginative intelligence among the ruling class of Frenchmen. The admirable poetry made in the Great King's reign supposed the rigorous distinction of mind from matter, and dealt exclusively with mind; its paramount concern being the conflict of passions, reason or discernment, and freewill in the social man. It sought to represent human truth purged of its accidents; and, instead of the ideal figure summing and lighting up the movement of the Sixteenth Century, that creature of diverse aptitudes, mobile temperament, and unprejudiced curiosity called the complete or universal man, it substituted, as the arbiter of its tone and language and interests, *l'honnête homme*—the cultivated man of the world, who made the study of his fellow-men (or more narrowly of his equals) the occupation of a stately leisure, whose talk was mainly a ventilation of ideas, a gleaning of maxims, a definition of types, and whose abhorrence of obtruded personality, intolerant of strangeness, mystery and emphasis in speech, proscribed the learned and the trivial jargons, terms of art and all that smacked of a function or a hobby or a trade.

L'honnête homme sublimated—such was the poet of those

[1] It lies between *Le Cid* (1636) and the last writings of Bossuet (1704): more narrowly between Pascal's *Provinciales* (1656) and *Athalie* (1691). King Lewis the Fourteenth succeeded in 1643 and died in 1715.

spacious days, one who eliminated both autobiography and the exaltation of unconscious nature from his matter, whose characteristic tone was neither introspective nor ecstatic, but observant, conversible, even declamatory, and whose predilection for the general, the human, and the durable, shaped a speech already rich in rational elements and if anything deficient in the sensuous; for he held the understanding supreme, the common measure of sensations, and was persuaded that we become entirely articulate only by being a little less ourselves. And so he renounced the elegiac solace of intimate avowals, the direct appeal from sense to sense and from mood to mood, the notation of fluid dreams, the hoarse eloquence of a dishevelled frenzy. What else more necessary to the vitality of art was implicitly sacrificed with these things, could not be discerned before time had exhausted the original energy that begot the three great dramatic poets and the one great lyrist of the seventeenth century.[1]

With a boundless sympathy, a temperament at once various, expansive and serene, the surest and the least crabbed insight into men, the readiest eyes a poet ever had, it was La Fontaine's feat to affirm himself wholly in the colour and savour and texture of style, to conciliate the love of art and the love of life in a playful offering of worldly wisdom, and to freight with a large representation of earth a fancy that remained aerial. To his power of illusion and exquisite sense of form it is certain that the shrewdness, the irony, the wit, a vein of discreet tenderness that runs through all his writings, a vision of reality singularly complete, are subordinate enhancements, not only in the Fables, but in the delicious and luxuriant comedies, and in those perfunctorily licentious Gaulish Tales which are to be read (in something of the spirit Charles Lamb recommended to the spectator of our artificial comedy[2]) as wonderful exercises

[1] The name of Segrais should no doubt come second (magno sed proximus intervallo) to La Fontaine's, as a bucolic poet of true but timid lyrical temperament.

[2] 'I am the gayer at least for it; and I could never connect those sports

in the graces of swift narration. Like all the classics—like most real creators—he dispensed with the credit of inventing his subjects or his framework; and by these, but much more by the ancestral, unstratified diversity of his language, he is a conciliator, soldering the Middle Ages and Marot and Rabelais both with antiquity and with his own time. Its peculiar virtues were all his: the interest of character, the very tone of reason, the scrupulous submission to conditional truth, limpidity, discretion, detachment; especially he had the genius of construction—that is, skill in marshalling the parts of a subject—and the rarer genius of composition, which means skill in distributing the parts of a poem. But his supreme originality lies in the continual invention of inimitable schemes, never exactly repeated, so supple, so delicate in their obedience to a secret rule that they seem the effect of blind chance or of a precarious power until they are studied and found to be the exact rhythmical equivalent of mobile sensations and an imperturbable comic spirit, and an undogmatical sagacity, and a quiet tireless zest for life.

The dramatists concern us here only as poets. When we have abstracted the splendid moral gesture of Corneille, the fanaticism of his *pundonór*, the casuistical basis of his keen dialogue, the thoughtful concentration of his busy plots, the poetry remains—a poetry which is the natural idiom of his thought, and never falters. Smoothness is not its merit, nor diapason, nor opulence of figures; and his manner, sometimes truculent and not seldom precious, yields to the alternative temptations of his time: but a virile energy, a solid eloquence which disdains extrinsic aids, and braces the will to heroical action by the bare presentment of absolute postures, a rhythm impetuous, without subtlety, translating the clash of minds by the eager attack of clauses —the brevity which resumes vital situations and digested truth, an easy and native pomp in the carriage of his lines—

of a witty fancy in any shape with any result to be drawn from them to imitation in real life. They are a world of themselves almost as much as fairyland.'

these things belong to Corneille, and, besides, a felicity of structure far surpassing his master Malherbe's, attested by the lyrical soliloquies of *Le Cid* and *Polyeucte* and by his versions from the Liturgy.[1]

The greatness of Molière, who gathers up in himself, as does no other French Augustan, whatever is most universally human in the genius of his race, might less unjustly be held independent of qualities in a special sense poetical. The steadfastness of his piercing smile is a necessary part of his definition, so are his resolute appeal to an almost inexorable sanity and the wisdom of his social sense; the invention, the formative power that fused Terence and Scaramouch and Patelin and the deep science of scenical perspective controlling the revelation of his creatures in words and acts, the near presence of his men and women and their indissoluble consistency as types, his loyalty to the conception of comedy and to the rule of one mood, even while his large philosophy continually points beyond the limits of the comic—by all this we are first and last impressed, to the prejudice it may well be of the admirable vehicle, prose or verse. The peculiar qualities of Molière's verse are vivacity and frankness. It is neither conspicuously sonorous nor often delicate, and negligences abound: but it is downright, full of pith, prompt and never halting, and wells free and warm from that teeming brain; and where, as in that delightful *Amphitryon*, his fancy schematises at will, he almost rivals La Fontaine and shows such a tact and resourcefulness as no writer, not essentially a writer of verse, could ever call to help him. Like Régnier, artistically in many ways his prototype, he is steeped in idiom, so that his very solecisms are racier than another's regularity. And the style deserves to be called national. It is indeed inimitably nervous and agile and vivid, and its fundamental unity is apparent to us; but it has an extraordinary range, as a style must have that is to contain the noble singularity of Alceste and Martine's rustic pertness with all that lies between;

[1] Not to speak of the improvised masque of *Psyché*, in which he collaborated with Molière and the deft librettist Quinault.

it transcends the courtly and the metropolitan; and the narrower taste of the time stumbled at its disparities, and especially at a certain preference for a popular tone which it discerned in him. Yet to suppose (with some modern critics) a sort of anti-classical protest in the great foe of fustian, eccentricity and the confusion of kinds, the natural, the reasonable and exclusively human master of 'man's proper faculty,' is strangely to misread Molière.

In the case of Racine at least no such discordancy has been suggested to his praise or blame: it is past doubt that his tragedy is quintessential, the most authentic and authoritative emanation of the classical French spirit, the sovereign equivalent in one art of a particular civilisation at its acme. He is not quite the greatest of French poets, nor even the most French, if we look for the intense affirmation of a characteristic drift—but simply the flower of the French mind. And so nicely trimmed is the balance of his properties that his singularity is ill to define and the real kernel of his genius is the less accessible to foreigners as he is not one of those who thrust forward insistently some single aspect—even the strangest—of the national soul. To us Englishmen Racine appears usually as an intelligence: his countrymen enjoy in his poetry, principally, a delicate mode of violent feeling. If any virtues of Racine's stand out, they are economy and the sense of values. Understand that a poet has weighed his words and thrown no word away, and you read him deliberately, you raise the currency of his thought, the temperature of his emotion. The rust is washed off the old lustre of metaphors, and what seemed the sign only of an idea recovers the vitality of an original sensation. For the significance of any gesture is at once relative to its rarity and dependent on the quickness of a sympathetic attention. The English poetical tradition is more tumultuous, more emphatic; and do not the Frenchmen of a later day feel all the seduction of a shriller pitch, a wider range? Nevertheless they retain the subtle memory of his atmosphere; and the *redintegratio amoris* which welcomes again and again so exquisite an example of

measure, a reticence, a suavity, a sparing of the pathetic goad ever grateful to a prompt and sensitive people, is as a continually fresh delight (after the torrents, the forests and the threatening cliffs of other lands) in the pastoral undulations of his Ile de France.

It is a little beside the present purpose to praise the magnificent order of the tragic matter in Racine, his austere exclusion of whatever might distract a spectator from the continuous action not of outward circumstances upon character but of passions alternately surging and receding and surging till they engulf the soul; or to note the intensity and the faultlessly true expression of the great figures—Hermione the injured beauty, dangerous Orestes, Roxana, the victim Phaedra and Nero's mother and Jehoiada the implacable fanatic—types which allured him less it seems by their prestige than by their parabolical humanity, as signal instances of our common case. Still less pertinent would be any consideration of his Greek scholarship; or of the degree in which Port-Royal may be held responsible for the 'Christian fatalism' discoverable, as some think, in his tragedies. But as more strictly within the poetical domain we may speak of his diction, the general colour of his work, of those sudden imaginative gusts which hardly shake the surface of his dialogue but leave a deep disquietude behind, —and above all of his verse in itself, the rich modulation and the cunning numbers. It is not a positive merit in Racine that, whether through a natural frugality or obeying the squeamishness of his society, he could contain himself within a very few thousand words; but it is a merit that he should have used them to such purpose. The speech of his creatures is in its elements almost the daily speech of well-bred people, and if that limitation accounts for certain minced or starchy formulas which afflict us now by their reiteration, yet more marvellous is the mastery which with materials so sober could reach and sustain an ideal solemnity of utterance. There is not one of his characters who exceeds the occasion, but also there are none that fall below the promise of their sounding

names. Being a poet, not an archaeologist, he held the ancients rather by their sure points of likeness to us moderns than by their problematical diversity: it is Shakespeare's superiority that his Greeks and Romans are even more particularly Jacobean Englishmen (clowns or captains) than Racine's are nobles of the galleries at Versailles; for Racine, like all his contemporaries, tended to eliminate particulars; but he as well as Shakespeare discerned the essential matter —that their creatures must be brought near to us to live. The 'sensible critic' in *Candide* advises that a dramatist should be always a poet, but take care none of his characters should seem poets. Voltaire was thinking of Racine, who echoed many voices with one voice — the triumph of illusion—and had the secret of a unity of tone that was never inappropriate. But Racine would not have been a great poet if, with words that are always directly relevant, he had not suggested infinite horizons. Sparse perhaps and uniform are the fragments he gives us wherewith to build a whole world of light and harmony fit to contain those souls of noble birth and the dignity of their conflicts and their anguish: but that whole world was in his mind.

As Racine shifted the main interest from the will to the passions without touching the framework or altering the scope of French tragedy, so he multiplied the aptitudes of the Alexandrine, but left it mainly the Alexandrine of Malherbe. Typical French poets from the beginning had usually accounted the pleasure conveyed to the ear by the mere sounds within a line, as distinguished from its rhythm, an accessory and inferior or even meretricious recommendation; and they had been used to concentrate all their purely 'musical' resources upon a rime which should strike the hour of a rhythmical period somewhat loudly and capture the mind by being at once expected and unforeseen. Racine possessed the instinct and the science of melody in a degree which has left him still without a rival: so surely did he play upon the degradation of the vowel scale, the kinship and antipathy of consonants, and so exceptional was the thought he bestowed upon the ill-ascertained element of

quantity, that he could well afford to be relatively indifferent to the sonority of his rimes. As to rhythm, he carried the principle of variety to the utmost point, while obeying the prescription of a fixed breathing-space in the middle of a line: indeed, like La Fontaine and Molière, he sometimes (and especially in his one genial comedy) hazarded a rhythmical equivocation by avoiding the coincidence of a logical pause with that required by the habit of the French ear. In a word, by his sure phrasing, his perfect use of metrical equivalents, the varied speed, the fullness and continuous euphony he imparted to the great traditional verse, Racine attained the extreme perfection of which it was capable without some change of formula. And the Alexandrine does not contain all his art. His early lyrics indeed are not much more than middling; but when in his prime an imperious scruple (of which no one should judge rashly) made profane poetry incalculably the poorer for his honourable retreat, he wrote some hymns which are of an exquisite savour, and later the choric portions of his sacred drama, and particularly the superb prophesyings of Jehoiada in his final masterpiece, show the full spread of his soaring genius and the whole stature of his yearning soul.

There was also Nicolas Boileau. The inconsiderate but very explicable contempt which two or three generations of French poets have thrown away upon the Legislator of Parnassus has altered the character of his renown without destroying it. As a lyrist in the proper sense there is no question of rehabilitating him: goodwill cannot galvanise the Ode on the siege of Namur; and the merits of his satire, in so far as it does not come under the head of criticism, may be justly stated in few words. He knew the town and studied the court, and rendered with a full flavour and the particular exactness of a lesser Dutch painter the outward symptoms of many follies that offended the sturdy and outspoken good sense of the cultivated juridical class. *Le Lutrin*, though less delicate and less effective than *The Rape of the Lock* or than *Vert-Vert*—a fairer comparison,—has humour, composi-

tion and vitality. In default of majesty or tenderness Boileau's verse does not want colour (for this bookish, sedentary person could use his eyes) and wears at its best a very natural air: it is 'a friend to light,' unsurpassably concise and even pregnant; and the rimes in general are anything but casual. But—to come to Boileau's literary doctrine —*L'Art Poétique* would not have been the complete gospel of poetasters for over a century, nor afterwards a red rag to the more aggressive sort of Romantics, if it had been considered in its historical significance. He made turgidity ridiculous, drove out the foreign fashions, and wrenched the poetical succession from the hands of gifted amateurs when their jargon and their driftless experiments were mighty. We have lost in some degree the very associations of his favourite terms. 'Truth' and beauty are one: but the truth is of a sort which should 'reign even in fable'—it is therefore the artistic sincerity which commands a poet to 'tell his readers nothing he has not told himself.' Nature could not mean more than human nature to his times; and all the teaching of Boileau goes to discourage that kind of eccentricity which overstrained the capacity for illusion at the point where it was then most sensitive—the knowledge of men's hearts. And when he made Reason the arbiter he was not depreciating sensation or strong feeling as a source of poetry, nor commending platitude, nor degrading poetry to the rank of an acquirable accomplishment, but persuading all who would write in verse to know their talent and not force it, and to remember how precarious is the charm of impressions which a co-ordinating principle does not present as objects of thought and judgment to posterity. The second-rate poet who thus cemented Malherbe's labour was devoted to his craft and its difficulties; and he came opportunely with his lesson—that the durable virtue of the ancient writers is their probity.

It is important that this should be admitted. For the insufficiency of his legislation can escape no modern mind. Boileau's whole system is too patently inelastic, rhetoricianly, full of dangerous equivocations—such as the

word *agréable*, which seems to confuse the aesthetic emotion with the satisfaction of contemplating objects pleasant in reality; or the word *noble*, which seems to confuse magnificence with breeding. It is noteworthy that he placed the mythological superstition under a religious sanction. The breach with the Middle Ages was indeed complete; and it was the Church herself whose late-born scruples had cut off the Christian sources from French poets and broken the continuity of French tragedy. If *Esther* and *Athalie* were unconscious attempts to recover the tradition of the *Mystères*,[1] here, as in other things, Racine had no successor. But, in one word, the counsels of Boileau are good and bad inextricably mingled. It is his lasting reproach that he offered poetical formulas only too capable of a mechanical application to the next age, which thought in prose. His best title to honour is that he gave his own age some solid reasons for preferring Molière, La Fontaine, Racine, to the wits, the pedants and the exquisites who applauded Pradon, governed the Academy, and still delighted the retired heroines of the Fronde.

IV

The art of Racine, the art of La Fontaine owes much of its essential harmony to a certain profound disinterest. It was positive, therefore serene; intense, not comprehensive; it knew its frontiers, and made a common conception of the world, of life and its business, the basis of a patient and solid psychological invention. Of this detachment, this acquiescence, the next age was radically incapable. The imaginative faculties were indeed at a discount, while the foremost minds were chiefly engaged in disseminating a critical spirit, and, later, in proposing postulates of tremendous import to mankind—an effort favourable in the long run to the rebuilding of poetry on broader foundations, but imme-

[1] This breach of continuity is the great historical difference between the French dramatic development and ours. Max Müller would have spelt it *Mistère*. The word does not represent, as he thought, the Latin *ministerium*; but the idea of 'liturgical function' is in it all the same.

diately productive only of a literature clogged with negations and enthralled to alien motives. Nevertheless throughout the space of years, notoriously ungrateful in the history of French poetry, which lies between the production of *Athalie* or La Fontaine's last Fables and the elegies of Lamartine, a superstition part academical, part worldly, and allied with a relative sterility, secured a kind of mechanical allegiance to the ideals of good writing which the men of the great reign had set before themselves, but which their successors failed to adapt to new conditions and to use as living principles. Therefore it is just to call this the age of the classical decadence.

The poetry then made in France was in the main abstract, and imitative, and unskilful. The versified ideology of the eighteenth century was something very different from that chaste, candid, orderly expression of general emotions and heritable truths to which a pure taste, ancient models of perfection and the acceptance of our reason as the ultimate and incorruptible tribunal had guided the masters of the seventeenth. Their matter was necessarily concrete; the nobility of their even tones communicated a generous exaltation quick to pierce the significance of moral types—the characteristic achievement of the French classics; their speech, stripped already of so many words carrying immediate and precise sensations with them, was still substantial, robust, suggestive. The contrast between the poetry of Racine's age and that of Voltaire's might almost be summed up, in this one aspect, by saying that the *general* was now deserted for the *abstract*, the representation of experience for the analysis of intellectual relations, painting for definition, the eloquence of eternal commonplaces for battles of syllogistic wit, the exploration of passions and the reconstruction of characters for a jingling together of mere notions and, as it were, an algebraical handling of disembodied qualities. This was the broad tendency,[1] never so despotic indeed as not to

[1] It affected the prose literature in a less degree—nearly all the vertebrate authors of the time are writers of prose. Lesage and Saint-Simon (who writes like a contemporary of the Fronde), Marivaux in his novels—for his

admit of several exceptions, phases and degrees, but upon the whole common to a poetry in which the rapid defacement of current metaphors and the penury of new, with all the timid and irrelevant prejudices which fenced about a bloodless but patented vocabulary, more and more attenuated the plastic elements of style. Confined almost to the traffic of ideas, the French language became in the eighteenth century incomparably apt for that employment: a speech incisive and colourless, frigidly transparent, brisk and nimble rather than energetic, subtly discriminative but short-breathed, elegant in outline but devoid of unction and amplitude—in a word, the perfect vehicle of exact science, humanitarian controversy, diplomatic reports; and for all the purposes of the imagination, too rare, too gaseous, too unreal. A verbal art aspiring to express the immaterial by signs that open out no avenues of sensuous memory is, if not a contradiction in terms, at the utmost a frail, shadowy, wire-drawn affair; and such an art, in certain exquisite examples, the eighteenth century did actually achieve. But most often even the artistic intention was absent from its verse, with the creative gust and the hunger for perfect forms: poetry itself was become a sort of superstition; and the pragmatical, the disintegrating curiosity which had sapped the authority of the ancients and dimly perceived already a world too wide for the circumscriptions and tranquillity of the classical ideal, were impotent to renew the sources of inspiration, or even to break rules of which the true sanction did not touch these times. The poets believed it possible to reproduce by system the recent masterpieces they admired by habit; their imitations were the more servile for being founded on imperfect understanding; and they still trailed after them the trappings of the Greek mythology without the ease of a familiar scholarship or the pretext of an over-scrupulous piety. The one serious attempt at emancipation threatened

delicate comedy is quite bodiless—Buffon, Diderot, Beaumarchais, are the least abstract of eighteenth century writers; all the imaginative vigour of Voltaire himself passed into certain of his prose works; and the great change was foreshadowed in the prose of Rousseau, and carried into the next period by the prose of Chateaubriand.

the very form of verse, at the beginning of this period, upon the score of uselessness! Voltaire and the protests of fashion saved from the assaults of La Motte-Houdart what was in truth very little worth preserving—the prestige of a troublesome full-dress for ceremonious occasions, the meretricious attractions of a slender envelope for bulky pamphlets. No symptom of degeneracy marks the versifiers of the classical decadence so universally as the neglect of their instrument. Melody was not in them, nor any gift of structure; movement they have, but without variety; their rhythm is a rigid symmetry of antithetical half-lines, and the indigence of their perfunctory rimes is complete and shameless. The poets had ceased to think in verse.

In a broad view, nearly all the verse made in the eighteenth century falls under two kinds—the didactic and the trifling, or, if you like, the instructive and the elegant; and perhaps all the exceptions to the general sterility should be assigned to the latter class. The period excelled, from Jean-Baptiste Rousseau to Lebrun and Andrieux and Chénier the younger, with the epigram. It offers models of neatness, niceness, ingenuity, wherever it is enough to scintillate without fatigue and without emphasis—in epistles, madrigals, compliments, anecdotes, and in the comic, acute or merely malicious (as opposed to the indignant and lyrical) satire, which aims only at raising against the victim 'the laughter of the mind.' With many of its fugitive poets, certain secondary traditions of the earlier seventeenth century showed a singular vivacity: an elegant impertinence reflected the revival of literary (as of political) energy in the great feudal class after a period of sourness and depression. One of its favourites, the epicurean priest Chaulieu—the easy and vigorous laureate of the Duchess du Maine's merry court at Sceaux, which balanced the morose propriety of Versailles in the last sad years of the old King—is astride between the two ages. Voltaire, as a fugitive poet, succeeded and far surpassed Chaulieu; the gallant Dorat continued Voltaire. But the most immediate success of the century, perhaps, was won by Gresset's unique *Vert-Vert*, a piece of very special pleasantry, rippling easily, unpretentious

to the point of negligence, but of Attic flavour and a freshness irresistible to Regency palates—a delicious thing in a little way, which foreign judges have sometimes praised hyperbolically for the satisfaction of acknowledging that the French are superior triflers. In Gresset, though he has no real models, the strain of Marot reappears, run somewhat thin. A little of Saint-Amant again, at least the Bacchic part of him, filtered down to 'Le Caveau,' the famous 'shades' where the *poètes crottés* clinked glasses—Vadé, who brought a sort of Billingsgate into fashion for a moment, Panard, a direct ancestor of Béranger and author of the inimitable description of the Opera, and that wild quarrelsome Piron who wrote many things well, comedies in verse and prose burlesques (the delight of suburban booths) and the most caustic of epigrams, and jolly drinking-songs; and at least one exquisite *rondeau*:

'Vivent les bruns en dépit des blondins!'

But if the poetry intended only to amuse the public or to exhibit a polite accomplishment was not wholly negligible, it was certainly less characteristic of the age than the poetry of proof and disproof. Didactic verse is, of course, as legitimate as didactic prose, though now far less useful (which is the test), because a kind of discourse in which the argument makes its own measures as it proceeds, can convey knowledge or opinions with greater subtlety and fullness, and the old advantage of verse that it is more easily remembered belongs to the childhood of letters and learning. This is why Voltaire, in his philosophical verse, only clogs the fluidity and honesty of his thought, and almost divests himself of those capital qualities of his, irony and speed. But if verse were as fit as prose to thresh out difficulties and refute errors and instil science, didactic verse would belong to literature even more seldom than didactic prose—only, in fact, when with a single purpose an author fulfilled a double set of conditions.[1] All that the didactic spirit accomplished

[1] Under modern conditions, the choice of verse as a medium implies that a writer does not care supremely for his subject in itself. Where, in all

in eighteenth-century verse was to corrupt even those artistic forms which are most obviously self-sufficient, and co-operate with the general tendency to abstractions, the purely decorative ideal of poetry which prevailed, whether the writer were merely a rhetorician requiring a theme for declamation (and this is the case of Jean-Baptiste Rousseau, who possessed nearly all the acquirable virtues of a poet), or one who by his very diverse energies was continually tempted, as Voltaire was in his tragedies, to exploit his most genuine creations in extra-literary interests.[1] His lamentable epic is both an exercise and a pretext. Its conception is irremediably systematic and frigid: a few brilliant portraits, two or three vivacious scenes, some astute views of statecraft strikingly expressed, these are all its recommendations, unless we add that the mere attempt to treat a living, national subject was a great step in a right direction. *La Henriade* is immensely inferior to *La Pucelle*; and this is perhaps the place to say that that burlesque epic has the same qualities as the shorter Tales of Voltaire. It is very unequal, and the grimace of its *ricanement libertin* is disagreeable: but the zest of its narrative movement must be recognised, and there is a literary virtue (which Renan and M. Anatole France have inherited) in the effective employment of a certain perfidious, discreet and implacable irony.

A particular species of didactic verse—the descriptive—in which the latter half of the period was amazingly prolific, must be mentioned, because nowhere else is the indigence of imaginative resources, the timidity and levity of the poets so conspicuous. As they were fundamentally

the instructive poetry of the last three centuries, is the equivalent in verse of Berkeley's *Theory of Vision* or Bossuet's sermon on Final Impenitence or Buffon's *Natural History* or Newman's *Grammar of Assent*?

[1] The failures of Voltaire as a tragic poet had, no doubt, many causes: the all-sufficient cause was a want of imagination, for which his dexterity in contriving stage effects, and his merely geographical enlargement of the traditional subjects, could not atone. But the polemical conception of some characters, the flatulent diatribes against priests and rulers of the people, were contributory disabilities.

indifferent to their matter, had no original emotions to communicate and were seldom supported by the remembrance of their own distinct sensuous perceptions, the one anxiety of the descriptive writers was to keep their diction at the diplomatic level while enumerating or defining, without choice, the contents of a drawing-room or an orchard, the joys of domesticity or the incidents of the chase. They are not for a moment to be compared with the better English 'poets of nature' who startled the Georgian dullness with their prim but charming preludes to the mighty outburst of our modern lyric. The insipidity of Saint-Lambert's paraphrase is in perfect contrast with Thomson's large harmony of effects and weighty manner. There is nothing of the humour and naturalness and sensitive colouring, the intense sympathy, the faithfulness of detail that make *The Task* and *Table Talk* delightful, to be found in *L'Homme des Champs* or in *La Pitié* or in any other work of Jacques Delille, who held the sceptre of Voltaire until the Restoration. Nobody was smoother than Delille, nor more glib, nor more uniform, and that ingenuity in devising phrases that neither name an object (kitchen utensil or field flower or domestic animal) nor suggest its essence, but imply, if you are sharp at guessing, its intelligible notion by discreet allusion, as in some *jeu de société*, had in him its most accomplished master. The fashion of descriptive poetry is, however, positively interesting for this reason, that it was ostensibly an effort to bring poetry into contact with everyday life and to make it contain more *things*. That was symptomatic of the trend towards comprehensiveness; and, with a little more sincerity, French verse at this stage might have expressed the impartial (yet genuine) curiosity in whatever has a character of its own, the instinctive realism, the diffusion of literary interest which belong, for instance, to the careless but nervous and expansive prose of Diderot. But what sincerity of expression could there be without the power of vision, the power of retaining and combining sensations, above all without a concrete vocabulary? As it was, there mingled with the frivolity

and the didacticism of French verse, more especially from the last years of Lewis the Fifteenth to the Revolution, a strain of roseate and elegant philanthropy, a skin-deep, self-satisfied tenderness.[1] The vogue of Young's *Nights* and Gessner's Idylls, the popularity of *Paul and Virginia*, the enthusiasm which doted upon the Creole languor and the Parisian lubricity of M. de Parny—a poet who possessed, however, a particular accent, some grace of melody, and deserves credit for keeping alive the tradition of the strophe—are so many symptoms of 'a waste of feeling unemployed.' Vagueness in art is much the same as insincerity; yet, as a body and its shadow are inseparable, it is not always possible to distinguish this complacent tearfulness, and all the cant about nature and simplicity and solitude which fed it, from the rare, authentic premonitions of a lyrical awakening. The starch and atrophy of classicism were first repudiated in prose—in the magnetical cadenced prose of Rousseau, the logician of instinct whose introspective idealism, at once profoundly unsociable and vehemently expansive, wrought miracles with a faded language long disused to express the correspondence between the inner and the outer world, and the eternal priority of the man who feels over the philosopher who reasons. And even Rousseau, if we can separate his purely literary influence from the contagion of his politics and the slower infiltration of his domesticity and his theism, caught the taste of his own and the next generation mainly by the elegiac strain in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*—a strain which so many reputations besides his had conspired to bring into the favour of drawing-rooms in the last years of the old monarchy. It is a strain common to prose and verse; but in all essential indications of a deeper change it was natural that verse should lag behind Rousseau's example and later on behind that of Chateaubriand, whose self-centred chivalry reinforced the protest against the suppression of personal emotion with a rarer visual memory and a more generous gift of verbal structure. Verse, its essence being conformity,

[1] It was Mademoiselle de Lespinasse who said of Diderot, quite justly: 'Sa sensibilité est à fleur de peau.'

offered a specific resistance to all aesthetical adventure, it was the stronghold of academical taste; and, as a vehicle eminently mundane in its later tradition, it was the less attractive to vigorous talents at a time when the serious issues on which the hopes of the nation hung were the tyrants of inspiration. The exception is André Chénier.

The ill-starred young poet[1] of the barbed *Iambes* and those delicious *Eglogues* was once claimed as a pioneer of Romance, but has long since recovered his true rank as a restorer of the classical tradition and as the one vigorous maker of verse with a generation in which he chimed in everything but his vigour. The fragments he left show a poetical ambition of infinite variety: what French poetry, but for his tragical death, had to expect from him may perhaps be better measured by the sketch of a *De Rerum Natura*, to which—like the insipid but scholarly Fontanes and other Frenchmen of the time—he had harnessed his talents already, than by the civic satire to which indignation whetted him, or by the personal cry which his fate wrung from him at the last. He sang for the most part on a scale of easy rationalism and superficial pathos, alternately expressing a modish dalliance and that sanguine humanitarianism of moderate reformers on which the sharp sword of a people in earnest swung suddenly down; but also the conscientious erudition then reviving, to which (more certainly than to a Greek mother) we owe the noble familiarity of his reproductions from antiquity—an Alexandrinism vivified, like that of Ronsard, by the experience of his own senses. Bray and the Ile de France are his Arcadia, and his nymphs have Christian names; and, in spite of lapses into the dullest allegory, André Chénier stands alone in the century as a poet whose descriptions are properly imaginative, who had, moreover, such skill in French verse as none had proved since Racine.

[1] Chénier's name is sometimes coupled with that of another poet who died young, Gilbert (1751-1780), who satirised the *philosophes* in somewhat remarkable verse, and whose swan-song (*Paraphrase de plusieurs psaumes*) happens to be in the same measure as the *Iambes*, though disposed in quatrains.

Grace, movement, verbal invention, expressive rimes distinguish all he wrote. He is not exempt from the vice of inversions, and on the other hand is sometimes irregular without reason, and it is too much to credit him with having really extended the rhythmical resources of the Alexandrine and shown the way to Victor Hugo; but he never used it perfunctorily, and visibly took a lesson from the Greeks in the art of varying his periods.[1]

The pompous vacuity of Chénier's political odes, half concealed by merits of structure, serves, as well as his brother's hymns and tragedies and most of the other poetry engendered by events, to show how little the Revolution and the Empire availed immediately to speed on the long-expected spring. That time of stress held in suspense the hopes of disinterested art. Official encouragement urged some inefficient talents to heroic narrative, and historical accident reinforcing the prestige of Rome and Sparta revived a pseudo-classical poetry in its most odious forms. Ducis, who had adapted Shakespeare with a timidity which belied his real enthusiasm, gave over his efforts to put new life into French tragedy; Lemercier in mock-heroic satire displayed more boldness than sense of form; abstract description emigrated with Delille and (having learned and forgotten nothing) returned with him; Chênedollé and Millevoye carried on the feeble fashion of elegant melancholy. Such was the state of French poetry just before the dawn; while in prose the work of preparation advanced with Madame de Staël, a poor artist but a brilliant desseminator of ideas, whose critical writings accustomed French minds to the notion of relativity in taste and recommended exotic masterpieces to their curiosity; but culminated with Chateaubriand, whose genius awoke the slumbering faculty of images, and, by an apology never before attempted, undermined the disastrous favour of indifferent mythologies and the in-

[1] Some of Chénier's alleged *enjambements* are merely the close of a parenthesis: others have an ill-considered dissonance. He was by no means the first to weaken, exceptionally, the 'median caesura'; and the instances of a *coupe ternaire* in his lines are very rare and equivocal.

veterate disdain for some essential sources of inspiration, sources as rich in visions as in feeling, and at once the most intimate and the most national of all.

V

Upon such antecedents, remote and immediate, followed that long spell of intense imaginative energy of which this book is meant to illustrate the characteristic production in verse. It is to be sure a subordinate, but still a conspicuous attraction of the French poetry made during the last three or four generations, that within its limits the fluctuations of the poetical ideal have been quick, full and conscious beyond any example in previous ages; so that, whether we consider the relation of art to the experience of artists, or the elasticity of the instrument, or the alternate supremacy of one or other element in all verbal expression—thought, sensation, feeling—we shall find that the leavening mass of excellent poets has travelled, not illogically and at each stage with a spontaneous and fruitful unanimity, from one extreme to the other of taste and method and intention.

The rapid determination and definite character of the successive movements distinguishable in the recent development of the French literature must be attributed in great part to the modern concentration of intellectual resources, and especially to those friendships grounded upon sympathies of the brain through which common formulas and doctrines are most surely elaborated. Our own literature has profited little in comparison with the French by such associations of groping talent: we do not owe much to schools of poetry and are wise perhaps to ignore them and to vindicate the dignity of insulated effort. But the French intelligence is eminently gregarious. Across the Channel, while the larger public remained indifferent to literary theory and even to poetry itself, the existence of an inner public relatively numerous and remarkably coherent, having a trained palate, strong traditions and a mobile curiosity, has tended to quicken aesthetical experiment, to sharpen

the rivalry of creeds and abridge the periods of gestation in which fitful velleities turn into dominating principles. It will hardly be said that, in the last eighty years at least, genius in France has been sacrificed to system or sterilised by fashion: but these changes of direction are the more luminous because they have been thorough and irresistible, and display abundantly at one view the utmost capacity of a race for poetry. He who turns from the elder writers to those of the nineteenth century may recognise in their output the several drifts and predilections, the congenital scruples, the sudden apostasies towards alien perfections, to which the French mind from the Crusades to the time of Napoleon had all along been prone. But the waves that have latterly carried it this way and that have been separated by none of those intervals of languor and stagnation which attenuate the interest of the earlier centuries.

The first, fullest and most violent of these waves is called Romanticism. The word *romantique*[1] in a literary application was brought into France by Madame de Staël, who, in her sensational and overrated work on Germany, used it somewhat confusedly to denote Northern literatures as opposed to Southern, personal as opposed to objective writing, and poetry concerned with modern and Christian subjects as opposed to poetry inspired by learned and pagan tradition. She connected it also with the legends and sentiments of chivalry. After various fortunes it has been long accepted as an inexact but serviceable name for the new and characteristic form in which the imaginative spirit, as it rose from its ashes, appeared invested. That spirit infinitely transcends Romanticism; but in the dazzlement of his resurrection, we see little else of the phoenix but his plumage.

French poetry recovered because poets were born in France. What determined its common features in the first

[1] In the eighteenth century it meant what is now expressed in French by *romanesque* and is still called romantic in English—an epithet of character. It is a derivative of *roman*, a word which once signified the speech of provincial Romans, and specifically of the Gallic provincials; thence, any composition in the vernacular, and finally a story in verse or prose.

generation is not so deep a mystery. Three factors seem essential: the bankruptcy of classicism; the political convulsions of thirty years; the influence (chiefly indirect) of foreign literatures.

The romantic movement was revolutionary: that is, its drift was to affirm what had been denied and to deny what had been indolently affirmed in the sterile years which went before it. It affirmed that poetry can better dispense with opinions than fail to touch the soul; that its scope is co-extensive with the whole world sensible and intelligible; that emotion is its very air, but that its diet must needs be concrete—in a word, that its sovereign faculty is imagination, that power to provoke the return of lively impressions made upon the sight and other senses in combinations inexhaustibly new, to quicken and humanise ideas by endowing them with the properties of animate beings, the loss of which had been the most conclusive disability of the classical decadence. It proclaimed all subjects legitimate. Unison is a narrower ideal than harmony; art fuses fair with foul and tears with laughter. Literary 'kinds' are arbitrary distinctions; or at least there is no natural or necessary connexion between a particular species of composition and a particular theme or tone. Literature is the expression of society, and therefore governed by the law of change. Periphrasis is not a grace, but a mark of impotence, and words which can only be replaced by phrases are good enough to use. The vital principles of verse—variety and order—are secured when a poet receives his measures and invents his rhythms.—In the directions indicated by some such formulas as these, the romantic spirit revitalised and enfranchised poetry, starved and hidebound as it had been for more than a hundred years. But indeed it was not content with repudiating Parny and Delille. It held Boileau accountable for Lebrun-Pindare; and even *Phèdre* was compromised in the disgrace of *Zaïre*; for though in principle the great Augustans were handsomely distinguished from their degenerate successors, the tendency of the new poets was to praise them obliquely for having done what they did in spite of their sub-

serviency to the classical ideals. It was not clearly seen, or at least it was not constantly remembered, that (just because literature is the expression of society) it is by Molière and Corneille and La Fontaine and Racine that those ideals are justified; and that the dearth of poets in the eighteenth century is not explained by the survival of a certain conception of poetry, but is the very reason why the eighteenth century had no formulas properly its own. For between the favourite notions of that contradictory and half-articulate age—Progress or Perfectibility, the opposition of nature and society—its general tendency to bring more and more things into the domain of literature,—and the old forms to which it clung, the old prejudices which it travestied, there was a fundamental incongruity.

We may assume that such a profound change as should bring poetry into line with life was sooner or later inevitable without the intervention of a social cataclysm or any foreign agency whatever. Did not the Revolution and the wars suspend rather than precipitate an imminent transformation? It is easier at any rate to feel the general analogy between those convulsions and Romanticism, as successive affirmations of French energy revived, than to point with any certainty to the positive influence of political vicissitudes upon the new poetry. Here are some of their least doubtful effects. By the Revolution many barriers to a social fusion were thrown down, the ancient provincial frontiers almost trodden out of knowledge, the number of readers and playgoers indefinitely increased, the classical system of education for a time disorganised. The realities of glory and peril fired home-keeping imaginations. An interval of conversational anarchy broke the tradition of self-effacement and discretion, and men of intellect learned to balance the loss of patrons with the luxury of talking about themselves. Some persecution, the continual hasard of sudden death, the tremendous demonstrations of providential design, quickened the capacity of prayer and kindled an atmosphere favourable to the aesthetical theodicy of Chateaubriand. The future poets, 'begotten between a siege and a victory,' rocked in epical

storms, grew up among intoxicating memories and titanic aspirations, hallucinated by the radiant figure of Napoleon, hungry for impossible adventures and solicited from their first lispings by the importunity of patriotic themes.

Undoubtedly also the great upheaval helped to bring the French mind into closer contact with the mind of Europe. It was not quite as when the Valois carried home over the Alps a spiritual booty more precious than many kingdoms: yet a real if imponderable share in this other (and so dissimilar!) Renaissance belongs to the French eagles; and its debt is still more evident to the studious wanderings of some French proscripts. But it is easy to overestimate the degree in which foreign examples impregnated French poetry at this critical stage. The fact is that the French have always, except for the brief period in which their classical masterpieces were making, been accessible to intellectual influences from abroad. Before the eighteenth century, the attraction was usually Southern: ever since the banished Huguenots founded French colonies in Prussia, England and the Low Countries, the new impulses have come most often from the North. But what distinguishes the exoticism of the Romantic period is not that it was particularly fertile, but that it was above all else dogmatic. The Romantic poets read Shakespeare: what they sought and found in him was chiefly a corroboration of their schemes for 'reforming' French tragedy—or, more generally, the most illustrious example of that comprehensiveness, that harmony of contrasts, that relative indifference to formal unity, which were notes of the new spirit. Scott and Byron in quite different ways confirmed Chateaubriand; so did what was known of Goethe; so did Macpherson's Ossian; and Schiller, who owes so much to Jean-Jacques, gave a sanction to his influence in certain directions. To the enchantment of distance in time and space (the picturesque view of history, the prestige of ruins, the joy in diversity), a Romantic element obviously stimulated by foreign literature as well as foreign travel, the French soul has always been sensitive. Two other elements—'the return to Nature,' and indivi-

dualism—may be called foreign, in so far as the inanimate had never preoccupied French poets as it had English, and they had never understood poetry as a confession. But René is independent of Werther and of Childe Harold. Those two Romantic figures impressed the French imagination profoundly, but their racial characteristics—the sentimental mediocrity of the German student, the insolent misanthropy of the English oligarch—could not really be absorbed. If 'the return to Nature' means attending to the beauty of landscape, or the perception of its analogies with the character of our passions, both are in Rousseau. There are faithful renderings of natural effects in Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. Chateaubriand is full of the *genius loci*. The conspicuous place of nature in French Romantic poets may almost be reduced to this—that they studied nature for the sake of metaphors, and that they revived an eternal commonplace of all poetry—the contrast between its serenity and our agitations. Nature, for the Romantics, was still a part of man.[1] For that conception it was useless to go to Shelley or to Wordsworth. The study of the inanimate as a basis for interpreting the world, which is as old as Bossuet, and the conception of man as a part of nature, which is as old as Buffon, fertilised much of the French poetry in the next generation: but whatever it owed to foreign science upon that score, its debt to foreign literature is inappreciable.

The establishment of a new principle—the principle of freedom in art—was the permanent benefit of Romanticism. Successive schools of French poetry have still appealed to this; and it is indeed the principle of any durable vitality. In its broadest application it means, not that perfection is relative, but that the roads to perfection are innumerable; not that there are no rules, but that the rule of rules is to be oneself. And this is to deny the statical conception of

[1] Anthropomorphism is of course the life of poetry: there could be no metaphors without it. But it may be remarked here that French art in general has resisted the efforts of modern thought to decentralise the universe. The foundation of scepticism in France has been consistently psychological: its reasons, that is, have been human reasons.

art in which the impotent and parasitical poets of the decadence took refuge. But in two points the Romantic vindication of artistic freedom was especially fruitful; and they are of paramount importance, since they have to do with the formal conditions of all poetry. The age-long depression of imaginative power, however independent of design or theory, had been aggravated at least by artificial impediments to its free exercise, and especially by that parody of true classical ideals which eschewed not only words so exact as to be technical and so far less broadly human, but words which (in Dr. Johnson's splendid phrase) are simply 'level with life.' In spite of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and its impassioned landscapes, in spite of the great precursor Chateaubriand, who, without adding overmuch to the speech of Bossuet, brought into French prose more than all the colour and cadence of the *Élévations*, the Napoleonic versifiers had been content with a decimated vocabulary, insufficient to name ordinary objects without periphrasis—hopelessly inapt to give a body to passion, life to inanimate matter, to synthetise the universe by translating simultaneous perceptions. To the young poets whose noviciate began with the return of the Bourbons, the bounds of the meagre traditional dialect appeared all at once as a preposterous obstacle: their emotional vigour, the pressing flood of their sensations surged against the dam of oligarchy. The republic of words, wherein domicile and service confer citizenship and from which a conscientious distribution of labour excludes the corruption of synonyms, was not to be founded in a day, though the metaphorical faculty was reawakened and seeking its nourishment in a fresh study of the external world. But from the moment when the restraints imposed by cautious elegance and accepted by a sapless ideology were really felt, enfranchisement was in sight already; and the fortunes of the language were committed to the guidance of men whose sure and curious vision, and tenacious memory for whatever had touched their senses or their sympathies, refused to deliver an unfaithful record. Their needs and their example

recalled many ancient words from their age-long banishment, enriched the common stock from the stores of technical usage, broke through the arbitrary barriers which separated the diction of verse from the diction of imaginative prose, effaced the stigma of triviality from whole families of sturdy and vivid expressions disqualified for no better reason than that they had continued to serve the unsophisticated part of the nation, spread abroad the gospel of an exact nomenclature and restored the wholesome habit of regarding the individual sign and not the ready-made phrase as the unit of thought. So searching and so necessary a reform, as it was hotly resisted, did not triumph without some abuses and exaggerations; but the wonder is not that mere novelty (a notion which includes the strangeness of archaisms) was sometimes held by the reformers a sufficient title to preferment, that they sometimes affected an ostentatious partiality towards the singular, the exotic, the forgotten, but that upon the whole the tact and learning of the leaders were as conspicuous as their enthusiasm; that Victor Hugo in particular, and his counsellor Sainte-Beuve and his lieutenant Gautier, were not only rejuvenators but reconcilers, kept a deep respect for the traditions of written French, cared to be understood, and refused the easy honour of creating an esoteric jargon.

The right to use every genuine word in the language on occasion is a fundamental condition of sincerity. But command of the special instrument is another. After more than a hundred years of mechanical exercises, the making of French verse definitely ceased, with the advent of Lamartine, to be a mere process of adjustment, and became once more the speaking of a mother-tongue. Lamartine was no metrician: he never possessed what Banville calls 'the imagination of rime,' and in embarrassment he readily leaned upon the tolerated license of inversions; but his eloquence was of a kind which falls naturally into recurrent forms, and he was congenitally endowed with the mysterious power of using sounds to reinforce emotions,

the instinct which seizes upon the illusory analogies of the ear and appropriates the sympathetic qualities of syllables to the matter. The elegiac smoothness, the celestial euphony of his song is all his own and is not, perhaps, a virtue which wears well; but after Lamartine no French poet could afford to neglect sonority.

Lamartine's originality did not lie in his form, however. He was content with traditional cadences. Victor Hugo is the sovereign forger of rhythms, as he is the absolute lord of metaphors. He began as a pupil—extraordinarily vigorous and fluent—of Jean-Baptiste Rousseau and the Abbé Delille. His formal genius ripened with the slow conquest of his spiritual personality, as experience nourished a visual memory of singular acuity, an imagination of immense synthetic power: gradually he added new cadences to the old and multiplied a hundredfold the rhythmical resources of French verse, especially of the Alexandrine—still supreme throughout a century in which no measure has been neglected. Among lines conforming strictly to the classical type, with its prescribed division into two equal periods of sounds and therefore of sense (the nature of stress in French requiring the concurrence), he interspersed, much more liberally than the great poets of the seventeenth century had done, other lines in which the logical or grammatical coherence of the words admits the marking of an interruption after the sixth syllable but suggests its relative effacement by making it subordinate to more effective pauses within the half-lines, occurring here or there at the poet's discretion. This sort of equivocation, or discord, was no new thing: but its frequency was new. When, later, adhering still to the traditional formula in far the greater number of his lines, Hugo so distributed his phrasing in the minority that the intention of bridging the median interval is unmistakable, a new type of Alexandrine was evolved: for the secondary groups subsisting now became the principal, and such a line was almost necessarily tripartite, and actually of shorter duration than the normally fourfold model of Racine. Yet, by a scruple

which has been commonly misunderstood, Hugo continued in all cases to make his sixth syllable final—that is, capable in theory of bearing a stress; and this was not a mere typographical superstition, but a delicate satisfaction of the memory. Thus, while the habits of the French ear were respected, its curiosity was gratified; and the sense of monotony being progressive, the modification was gradual. The introduction of a discord prepared the way for a new concordance which differed from the old by making prosody obey instead of governing the purpose of the poet. Rhythm, in the Romantic Alexandrine, is expressive, or we might say realistic: since the natural expression of emotion tends indeed to recurrence, but to intermittent and complex recurrence. Hugo did not limit the operation of this principle to the internal economy of the line: it involved also a modification of the old rule that a strong cleavage should separate line from line, and reacted against the old tendency to complete the sense strictly within the bounds of each riming pair of lines. Not only did he enfranchise the elaboration of thought from the care of symmetry, but discreetly and occasionally he even prolonged an indivisible logical (and consequently a rhythmical) period beyond the last syllable of a line, so that the breathing-space between two lines was suppressed. This sort of syncopation, together with his innovations in the internal rhythm, would have disconcerted the ear to the extent of endangering the stability of the measure itself if it had been frequent or arbitrary, and especially if the unity of the line had not been accentuated by the *rime*, which in Hugo and his followers is an element of supreme importance. That it should be exact was not enough: it must be emphatic, and difficult: it must always surpass the expectation of the hearer. This was to return to the precepts of Malherbe; but Hugo's conception of rime is imaginative as well as material. He conceived it as not only sonorous, but suggestive, symbolical—not only a bell which enforces the sensation of time, but a beacon to the vision and the understanding. And it is true that some-

times he saw in it a mere pretext for an astonishing display of virtuosity, a sort of goddess Fortune, a *sesame* wherewith to unlock a treasury of verbal improvisation. But these abuses have the excuse of an exuberant genius which is its own tempter; and, when all is said, they are rare in proportion to his output. And it remains true that Hugo went to the root of poetry in discerning the mystical collaboration of a consecrated element of form (which so easily degenerates into a meretricious accessory) in the travail of the spirit.

The greatest of the French poets influenced the form of French verse in other things besides rime and rhythm—notably in structure; for if he invented no new measures, and scarcely any new types of strophe, he carried an immense number of those existing already to perfection, and he restored the French ode by his science of composition, his unequalled power of varied movement and his majestic sense of climax. But his service to the Alexandrine (in which, as in other services, he had counsellors and collaborators, but no master) is such that it seemed worth while, at the risk of a little apparent disproportion, to describe in some detail its principal features. For in no other direction did the Romantic cry for freedom, for fresh air, corrected by a very French instinct or scruple of continuity—for which the movement has received too little credit—achieve results at once so characteristic and so durable.

The triumph of Romanticism was complete and short-lived. It was a fever, vehement and transitory; it was a movement, and 'a movement,' said Newman, 'is a thing which moves.' Victor Hugo, as also Alfred de Vigny, remained superior, if not indifferent, to all the literary movements of the century. The militant phase of his career as a poet is identified with Romanticism; at his zenith—and he was yet to rise to his full height in lyrical satire, in historical rhapsodies, in vast apocalyptic poems of a category still unnamed—his inspiration is largely objective, and much that was vital in the later formulas is contained in him: but none contains him, nor (though his

supremacy was undisputed) did he preside over the elaboration of any.

It happened that the fall, in 1843, of Hugo's fine drama, *Les Burgraves*, which revealed the epic poet in him, was hailed as a public sign that Romanticism had lost ground; and Ponsard, whose agreeable talent was essentially eclectic, appeared for a moment to stand for the revenge of common-sense over a magnificent absurdity that had held the stage too long. As a matter of fact, the Romantic charm, as represented for example by Alfred de Musset, was just beginning to penetrate the most conservative element in France, the provincial middle-class; and the great Romantic commonplaces, in a debased, conventional form, were almost popular. The fertile discontent, without which French poetry would once again have sunk into hebetude or dissolved in chaos, arose among the poets themselves; and it was not for some years after *Les Burgraves* that its results appeared in a fresh wave of lyrical energy.

The charge against Romanticism of being a foreign thing is easily refuted. Nevertheless, that opening of the floodgates to all the forms of egoism and all the curiosities of feeling which gave birth to a poetry as various in its interests as it was rich in its assemblage of temperaments, implied a conflict with some constitutional leanings of French art—its abhorrence of singularity and tumult, its incorruptible desire for order, for measure, for a conscientious absorption in the object. The autonomy of the imagination had been vindicated against the despotism of a taste and a code which once were held immutable: it was time to impose a new discipline. The next phase, though it repudiated none of the Romantic achievements, was reactionary as well as derivative, and in so far it interpreted the repentant sanity of the race, after a surfeit of rebellious splendours.

The great militant generation of poets had brandished the notion of beauty self-justified in the faces of their elders, and had given some examples of an indestructible and flawless excellence; but in general they had seemed to prefer adventure, character, vitality, to that perfection in which form

and matter are one. They had measured success by the intensity rather than the quality of the emotions they excited. They had nursed the idea of inspiration as a state of passive receptivity; but they had too often mistaken the craving to project an ideal personality for an imperious visitation of the muse. They had trusted in their own exuberance, and, disdaining to know, had asked of time and space nothing more than an incitement, a background, an embroidery. And some of them had written their lives.

In the seventeenth century a native jealousy of the self-assertion which would exalt a singer above his song had expressed itself characteristically as a social virtue and as a rule of reason: it was an offence against good-breeding then to take the world into your confidence, and he who strove to communicate what made him different from other men was so much the less human and the less intelligible. Those particular sanctions were obsolete; but the same instinct was still lively. It prompted the poets who succeeded the first champions of artistic freedom to propose a new ideal of serenity, of a serenity no longer acquiescent, no longer founded upon common certitude and voluntary limitations, but absolute, comprehensive, in some sort superhuman. Art, they thought, is a sanctuary, a refuge from the transient. It advances no proofs, it defends no persons: it imposes a transfiguration of the world. The creation of beautiful forms, which is a great deliberate exercise of special faculties, cannot but express the intimate being of an artist. His work itself is his likeness; but his passions, misfortunes, ambitions, prejudices, are irrelevant. If he is preoccupied with the transmission of his own image, his hand will tremble; and this means, not that he will be more sincere, but that he will be less accomplished. Further, to invent is not to imagine. An imagination which is not continually fed by reality, necessarily drops into vagueness or convention—chews the cud or starves. A new vision of the world is the result of a steady undistracted gaze; and what sort of an illusion is that which a little experience reproves? Your Romantic Italy is at the mercy

of every traveller; the merest dabbler in history knows enough to contradict your Romantic conception of the Middle Ages; and to men of the world human nature seems too complex for your Romantic antitheses and inconsequences of character! The poet must remain invisible and neutral, using his intelligence to sift and harmonise the chaos of sensations, not to betray the reaction of his personality upon the material life offers.

It was the bias of the Parnassians (as the poets of this second generation were called after a famous anthology) to depreciate personal emotion in poetry and to give preeminence over other qualities to the quality of *seeing true.* Insensibility has been laid to their charge; and realism. And it is true no doubt that the Olympian attitude attracted a congenital aridity in some secondary followers of Leconte de Lisle; while others practised the merely acquirable faculties of expression upon literally translating brute fragments of experience, chosen with an impartiality very near indifference. But the principle of self-repression, which enjoins the loyal presentment of objects, by no means proscribes those which our minds cannot contemplate dispassionately; and to restore the authority of observation and study is not to propose the attainment of a neutral truth as the supreme end of art. Judged by the masterful works in which the leader of this school sought to reanimate the successive illusions of the race, the characteristic matter of Parnassian verse, if not directly passionate, involves the perpetual source of human sorrow and hope. In the mid-century, while determinism reigned and the conception of a universal flux, the aching sense of our common mutability had greater power to inspire than the thrills of any particular agitation: the staple themes of lyricism, discredited as they were by the romantic abuse, suffered a partial eclipse; but a penetrating, if diffused, emotion clings to those inconstant dreams of the divine which the greatest of the Parnassians marshalled in a grave and elaborate procession.

No school has ever held up a more inflexible ideal of autonomous beauty. Order, harmony of parts, measure, the

absolute probity of words, sonority, salient rime, clear rhythmical formulas crystallising the temerities of Hugo and his fellows—without these the Parnassians did not conceive perfection; by these they undertook to chasten and to integrate their impressions of the sensible world—for (eliminating personal sentiment and opinion) they chose to concentrate the resources of expression upon the revival of sensations, and chiefly those of sight. Another test of absolute sincerity they imposed—minute attention and research—a homage to ascertainable truth which often strikes us as disproportionate; and in order to escape out of themselves they too readily submitted their credentials to archaeology, physics and the study of comparative religions. Leconte's famous equivocal appeal for a partnership or a confusion of art and learning,[1] an unconscious threat to degrade poetry to the rank of a tire-woman to science, paved the way for a fatal usurpation; in spite of its disdain for the present and the particular, its stately and arrogant aesthetics, Parnassianism cannot be acquitted of a certain affinity with that denial of all art called realism. If art, being creative, is necessarily a variation, a falsifying of experience, it would seem at first sight that the art of Parnassus should have been the more averse from the bare notation of experience, original or second-hand, as the formal and logical conditions it laid down were more stringent and complex and its material more recondite. Yet nothing, in fact, is more certain than that the multiplication of obstacles and delight in overcoming them are entirely compatible with a poetry of reproduction. Indeed, if several adherents of an artistic ideal essentially noble tended in practice to accept the mere imitation of nature as a sufficient motive; if a rigorous exactitude, which in their general system had been no more than a precaution or a protest against the whims and blunders and self-absorption of the Romantics, too often remains the only interest of their inelective content, it may well be that, apart from any scientific ambition, an almost athletic craftsmanship disposed them to value description for its own sake.

[1] See the Preface to *Poèmes Antiques.*

Never before had so high a level of technical accomplishment been so commonly attained: this fact contains a warning that the Parnassian perfection was largely mechanical and wanted spontaneity. The instrument was in truth not so supple but that our pleasure in all save the greatest poets of the school can be dissociated from our interest. There is something that the unflagging splendour of its rhythms, the transparency of its marble surface, its uniform movement, its serenity, its dazzling and well-filled pictures never succeed in expressing—something more essential than the objects and the relations of objects which it names with infallible precision—perhaps the very imperfection of the mobile and sensitive human mind.

About the time when Victor Hugo, the prisoner of his renown, was giving his last energies to tedious polemics, French poetry took its bearings anew and began to shape another course. Some, who had served a zealous noviciate to the austere discipline of Leconte, came to believe that their art, encumbered with conditions and exhausted by the effort to reconcile comprehensiveness with finish, was drifting slowly towards the sandbank of a servile virtuosity. It appeared to them distinguished and unprofitable, full of things and empty of soul. They had dreams of an art more discreetly supple and less monotonously accomplished, entirely intimate and vital, willing to relax its grip upon the world outside us, to forgo its pretensions to be absolute and even to reject the pomp of approved harmonies, in order to be truer to the gaps and ellipses, the gropings and the embryonic velleities which are so large a part of our consciousness. After a spell of agile adventure under the Parnassian banner, Paul Verlaine—at heart perhaps an incorrigible romantic, but a romantic purged of emphasis and disburdened of picturesque accessories—stripped his verse, at a great spiritual crisis, of rhetorical impediments to a self-mortifying candour, and discovered a fresh enchantment in that ultimate sincerity which has done with eloquence and the dignity of art. His gift of familiarity, which makes all his predecessors seem unnatural and ceremonious by

comparison, was too singular to descend to any: at least his example gave a strong impulse to that recrudescence of individualism which is the widest possible definition of post-Parnassian tendencies. As a versifier he was no revolutionary, being mainly a respectful pupil of Victor Hugo and, it may be added, of Racine, but his frequent recourse to assonance and internal rime, his fondness for 'uneven' measures, and generally for rhythms which present themselves ambiguously, obscured his real attitude in the eyes of contemporaries and successors who had not his tact and his sense of idiom to secure them against cacophony and solecism.

Verlaine is familiar and exquisite. With the outwardly graceless and fragmentary writings of Jules Laforgue, the sense of revolt against erudition and 'objectivity' and exactness becomes clearer—a double and at first sight contradictory impulse urging French art to the very frontier of expression and bringing into question the whole aim and object of speech. On the one hand, an exasperated hunger for the actual was ready to sacrifice the prestige of form in so far as that implies a certain unveracity, since it subordinates what is personal, natural and spontaneous to the general or permanent or rational aspects of the universe; and exacted as essential to a really complete probity that the very lisp and stutter of the mind should figure in the crude notation of our briefest impressions. On the other—and of the many tendencies imputed to Symbolism this is the most characteristic—out of an acuter perception of what all poets have always known, that words are insufficient if their power is bounded by their meaning, emerged an audacious doctrine which branded their representative function as inferior, and sought to shift the poetical interest from what they signify to what they may suggest. In the Parnassian system description was paramount, and feeling sprang from it immediately: the emotion which Symbolism pursues bears no constant relation to the objects represented or the ideas expressed; rather it aims at the recovery of vanished moods by curious incantations, by the magical influence of verbal atmosphere. To fashion a true likeness

of the material world it holds a vain and illusory undertaking: it values sights, sounds, scents and savours for their secret affinities with states of the soul. Like the Romantics themselves, the Symbolists are concerned above all with self-revelation; but they would substitute for the romantic embellishment of passionate life the presentment of characteristic images more or less coherent—landscapes seen in dreams and desired like home — legends deformed and wrested from their first import—fancies which betray an intimate obsession and reflect a singular habit of association.

Faith in the correspondence between sensible and spiritual is common to all mystics; but it would be useless to assign to the French poets of to-day and yesterday a place in any mystical tradition. Their very starting-point is impatience of approved methods, the will to be *oneself* to the verge of mental insulation. Hence that scruple of sincerity which has applied the precept of fidelity rather to the distant emotional effects of sensation than to things perceived, and recommended, as a condition, that poetical forms should be improvised to suit the needs of a mood. For that is the general sense of a rhythmical anarchy which in the view of the half-lettered public at least has held the foremost place among competing definitions of the Symbolist movement. And certainly the theory of self-expression outlined here has an obvious leaning towards the abandonment of settled forms. But it is notable that the urgency of a prosodical reform which should abrogate such rules as had outlived their motives had been long apparent to poets and critics of very different schools; while, on the other hand, independently of any theory, something like a violent disruption of the native prosody has unquestionably been promoted of late years by a foreign invasion. There are aliens writing French at this day who have acquired every privilege of the French ear, but cannot enter into its prejudices; who are not perpetually haunted and arrested by reproachful echoes of a more clearly ordered poetry, and have no persistent reverence for every stage of a slow development in which their own races had no share; who moreover in their most

original deviations from the normal French rhythms seem to be unconsciously obeying the laws of a different music—that which their own ancestors made with another speech. Accomplished as they are, they have not feared to assail the very citadel of French versification—rime and the enumeration of syllables; indeed, not only the most durable part of the ancient system, but the sovereign principle of all Occidental verse, which is variety in recurrence, was jeopardised when French poets (hardly ever of authentic French race) began to question the necessity of rhythmical units and of rhythmical formulas such as the trained ear may seize and retain. In a word, the Symbolists conceived self-expression as the triumph of the arbitrary. And, if it were admitted that by exacting from themselves a continual effort of formal invention minutely equivalent to the play of the individual mind they have, for the first time perhaps since verse was verse, raised it to an austere disdain for all that is merely mechanism, processes, decoration, they would still be chargeable with a strange ignorance of that which the very medium implies, its fundamental dependence upon a *habit* of the ear;—nay, of that universal requirement of all art, that it should translate solitary impressions into common forms. For what are rhythmical intentions which do not command the voice and which no inveterate expectations help us to interpret?

That is not, of course, the only obscurity that shrouds the characteristic productions of the school. It was very well to abandon description for its own sake: a graver insignificance than that of the lesser Parnassians results from a fastidious search for unsuspected affinities between the subtle motions of the heart and the changing face of the world. All nature, let us grant, is a symbol. But how often, in the poetry of the symbolists, the pretext for an analogy appears frivolous or, for want of a sufficient initiative, remains simply imperceptible to us who have not shared the fugitive experience that suddenly suggested it! Bewildered by the choice of purposes, one may well hesitate whether to regard their esoteric language as an algebra designed by the private

economy of incommunicable minds, or as a mere accompaniment to melodies unheard, a more or less eloquent and engaging testimony to a new despair of words.[1]

Rapidly invasive and not endemical merely—for with less concentration than in France the same or a like impulse has been felt all over Europe—these tendencies have quickened, or complicated at the least, some rare poetical temperaments, to say nothing of the groping or insincere vocations which the doctrine of symbolism has flattered and its vogue accredited. The pure Symbolist perhaps is indiscoverable. And where the enthronement of mood and the exclusive pursuit of the subconscious and the ineffable, the deliberate instability of structure, measure and rhythm, the raising into a system of those discreet occasional effects which poets before this time had drawn from the casual and secret memories of words enhancing their own value—wherever these things have been as tyrannous in practice as in precept, they have produced as yet nothing full, nothing whole, nor majestic nor even faultless; little enough that by virtues of a subtler kind atones for the want of order and light. Yet they are the notes of much that is charming, strange and generous in recent French poetry; and its immediate destiny is largely in the hands of poets whose beginnings were absorbed in the Symbolist campaign and who have outlived the crude and provocative stage, to reveal by their personal effort an unexplored capacity in this instrument for rendering certain half-tones of sentiment, a day-dream tenderness, a diffused nostalgia, desires without a name and sorrows older than they.

But whatever the positive achievements of a school already in dissolution, they are not the measure of the interest and the hopes that lie in a phase very evidently transitional—a phase of readjustment or renovation, of experiments made not as usual behind the scenes, but defiantly in the full glare

[1] So in the drama of a prose Symbolist, M. Maeterlinck, dialogue—intentionally trivial and incoherent—often does no more than punctuate the dumb eloquence of internal action.

of the footlights.[1] There is no room to enlarge upon the connection between that postulate of the symbolists, that it is we who make the world, and what philosophers call subjective idealism; nor upon that notion of convertible sensations (colours, sounds and odours interchanging) to which we may trace certain favourite effects of theirs; nor upon the abundant material they bring to illustrate the interdependence of the arts—a commonplace since Diderot—by a musical conception, succeeding the plastic conception of poetry.[2] But in the general history of art, symbolism is inseparable from a salutary vindication of the eternal instinct which seeks to give a meaning to our perceptions, and of the right to make nature itself the mirror of a more authentic personality than any record of doings and sufferings or any formulation of opinions can reveal. It has been an assertion, however eccentric, of the human and spiritual interest which the ideal of a scientific neutrality had thrown for a moment into the shade.[3] Its excesses, which are evident, are the excesses of an intense individualism: its obscurity is that of men who will only speak their own language, and its very formlessness, born of continual improvisation and the contempt for ritual, is a sort of emancipation. And this curious and in some degree chaotic adventure has furnished, at any rate, a striking testimony to the poetical vitality of the French, at the close of a century so eminently fertile in poets.

In the dawn of another, we may already see emerging once more the native qualities of finish, directness, composition, measure, chastened emotion, blent—in the works

[1] Mallarmé (referring mainly to the technical side of the movement) noted that 'la retrempe, d'ordinaire cachée, s'exerce publiquement, par le recours à de délicieux à-peu-près.'

[2] I am not thinking here of the closer attention paid by some of the recent poets to the expressive value of sounds; but if poetry has been diverted from its representation of objects to the suggestion of trains of feeling and the effacement of *matter*, this may be called a musical direction (in spite of 'programme music').

[3] It is worth noting that Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, one of the initiators, whose reputation, however, rests mainly upon his prose masterpieces—spent his fine gift of irony on what he called *la banqueroute de la science.*

of some repentant Symbolists—with an added sensitiveness and suppleness, a richer gift of tears, a greater intimacy. If this is a reaction, it contains no hint of tedium and implies no languid repetition of old formulas. It may be that before long the oscillations of many centuries are to subside into an equilibrium of those eternal elements—thought, sensibility, imagination—which have struggled hitherto, and most fiercely in the period I am to illustrate, for the exclusive direction of French poetry. But this survey must not end with a prediction: its aim has been attained if I have been able to put forward a notion of the French poetical tradition, and of its wealth, so far definite that those who shall peruse the following examples may be tempted to verify it and, in any case, may give to the French poetry made in the last few generations its place, a splendid place, in a continuous development which has been proceeding for more than eight hundred years, and is proceeding still.

CHARLES MILLEVOYE

1782-1816

MILLEVOYE was born at Abbeville in Picardy of poor parents who died young, and after a sickly and studious childhood worked in a lawyer's office and at a bookseller's. Academic honours came to him early, and a poem on the passage of Mount St. Bernard by the French troops was substantially rewarded; but it was his elegiac verse which won the applause of society. A disappointed affection and a rather brilliant and feverish way of life defrayed by Imperial munificence helped to ruin a feeble constitution. He went to Italy, but felt himself inferior to the task of writing an epic on Napoleon's victorious campaigns in that country; returned and married, lost his eyesight, and lived a short while longer in complete retirement.

The other poets of the First Empire (Andrieux, the author of 'Le Meunier Sans-Souci,' belongs rather to the preceding period) are entirely forgotten: Millevoye keeps a certain historical interest, if nothing more, as the most complete and gifted representative of the sentimentalists who are a real link between the Classical decadence and the Romantic dawn. By his elegance (which is genuine), the timidity of his vocabulary and his somewhat invertebrate rhythms, he belongs wholly to the first; but when all is said, a vague and lymphatic plaintiveness aspiring to find an accomplice in 'nature' is at least part of the dross of Lamartine—and all of Millevoye that need concern us. Not but that he tried many strains—the heroic even, and the exotic; but he never achieved anything so characteristic or in a sense more perfect than the following piece, of which, with the irresolution of a transitional poet, he gave several improved versions, and which has been cruelly described as 'la *Marseillaise* des mélancoliques.'

Millevoye's works are to be found in the *Bibliothèque Charpentier.*

I

La Chute des Feuilles

De la dépouille de nos bois
L'automne avait jonché la terre;
Le bocage était sans mystère,
Le rossignol était sans voix.
Triste et mourant, à son aurore,
Un jeune malade, à pas lents,
Parcourait une fois encore
Le bois cher à ses premiers ans.
'Bois que j'aime, adieu! je succombe.
Votre deuil a prédit mon sort,
Et dans chaque feuille qui tombe
Je lis un présage de mort.
Fatal oracle d'Epidaure,
Tu m'as dit: "Les feuilles des bois
A tes yeux jauniront encore,
Et c'est pour la dernière fois.
La nuit du trépas t'environne;
Plus pâle que la pâle automne,
Tu t'inclines vers le Tombeau.
Ta jeunesse sera flétrie
Avant l'herbe de la prairie,
Avant le pampre du coteau."
Et je meurs! De sa froide haleine
Un vent funeste m'a touché,
Et mon hiver s'est approché
Quand mon printemps s'écoule à peine.
Arbuste en un seul jour détruit,
Quelques fleurs faisaient ma parure;
Mais ma languissante verdure
Ne laisse après elle aucun fruit.
Tombe, tombe, feuille éphémère!
Voile aux yeux ce triste chemin,
Cache au désespoir de ma mère
La place où je serai demain.

Mais vers la solitaire allée
Si mon amante désolée
Venait pleurer quand le jour fuit,
Éveille par un léger bruit
Mon ombre un instant consolée.'

Il dit, s'éloigne . . . et sans retour.
La dernière feuille qui tombe
A signalé son dernier jour.
Sous le chêne on creusa sa tombe.
Mais ce qu'il aimait ne vint pas
Visiter la pierre isolée ;
Et le pâtre de la vallée
Troubla seul du bruit de ses pas
Le silence du mausolée.'

PIERRE-JEAN DE BÉRANGER

1780-1857

His origin was humble, in spite of the 'noble particle,' the incongruity of which suggested one of his best songs. Born in Paris in 1780, he received a summary education, and for many years earned an insufficient livelihood as a clerk. His first literary efforts were encouraged by Lucien Bonaparte (the sincere Republican of his family), who on retiring to Rome placed his salary as a member of the Institute at the disposal of the young poet. Before Napoleon fell, Béranger had written *Le roi d'Yvetot* and other songs now almost equally celebrated; but it was the Restoration which made him famous by the matchless opportunities it offered to light satire by its petty tyrannies, its affectations and the essentially unnational basis on which it rested; and the touch of scandal which has sealed so many reputations in French poetry was not long wanting, for the poet was twice imprisoned for seditious libel, once in 1822 and for a longer period in 1828, when a delightful satire, *Le Sacre de Charles le Simple*, and *L'Ange Gardien*, a piece of rather mild Voltairianism, gave offence to Church and State. The revolution of July avenged and exalted him; but Béranger's 'liberal bonapartism' did not disarm during the reign of Louis-Philippe, and in 1847 he foretold in his most spirited verse the cataclysm which was to shake so many thrones in Europe. His last years were easy and honoured, and when he died the Second Empire tried to take official possession of his fame by giving him a public funeral—logically, no doubt, for the songs of Béranger had contributed as powerfully as Hugo's odes or the history of M. Thiers to build up the Napoleonic legend, and thereby provide a popular sanction for the *Coup d'État*.

The French song, bacchic, amorous or political, was several hundred years old when Béranger, ignorant of its remoter traditions but inheriting a great share in the native instincts which created it, gave new life to a form of poetry which, more than any other that survives, is fitted to express what may be called the Sancho Panza side of the French temperament: for the ideal Frenchman contains Don Quixote along with his squire. Many of Béranger's contemporaries made extravagant claims for his lyrical talent: after half a century and

more it is not easy to do him bare justice. For one thing, we are indifferent to the idols and bugbears of that day; and for another, we read instead of singing him. Wilhem and the rest of his musical collaborators are almost forgotten, and (tenth-rate composers as they were) this is a loss for Béranger. It was often said foolishly that he raised the song to the rank of an Ode: his real merit is that he saw the importance of the dramatic element in a sort of verse which is nothing if it does not suggest action. His typical song is a dialogue, even when one of the parties is suppressed; and something is going forward before our eyes and we are impelled to intervene. Movement, facile enthusiasm, an undeniable dexterity in the combination of his measures, a knack of unforgettable refrains—this is almost the sum of his qualities. Béranger is an artist in the narrow sense—a writer who perfectly understood how to contrive particular effects—and in no other. He is full of the old Adam of the eighteenth century, with his odds and ends of mythology, his abstract words, the poverty of his rimes and, above all, with the gay but prudent materialism which is essential to him. To his credit be it said, he was a patriot without an afterthought; his tolerance is not assumed; singing not exactly for the people but (like Mr. Kipling) for the man in the street, he did really feel sometimes for the outcast of cities and highways; and if in the evil days of the Restoration it was Courier, the scholar-husbandman, who wielded what Mr. Meredith calls finely the sword of common-sense, Béranger was the more effective, being the less sophisticated, champion of free speech; and in so far his attitude is not unheroical.

The principal collections of Béranger's *Chansons* appeared in 1815, 1821, 1828, 1831, 1847. There are several editions, more or less complete.

II

Ma Vocation

Air: *Attendez-moi sous l'orme.*

Jeté sur cette boule,
Laid, chétif et souffrant;
Étouffé dans la foule,
Faute d'être assez grand;

Une plainte touchante
De ma bouche sortit;
Le bon Dieu me dit: Chante,
Chante, pauvre petit! (*Bis.*)

Le char de l'opulence
M'éclabousse en passant;
J'éprouve l'insolence
Du riche et du puissant;
De leur morgue tranchante
Rien ne nous garantit.
Le bon Dieu me dit: Chante,
Chante, pauvre petit!

D'une vie incertaine
Ayant eu de l'effroi,
Je rampe sous la chaîne
Du plus modique emploi.
La liberté m'enchante,
Mais j'ai grand appétit.
Le bon Dieu me dit: Chante,
Chante, pauvre petit!

L'Amour, dans ma détresse,
Daigna me consoler;
Mais avec la jeunesse
Je le vois s'envoler.
Près de beauté touchante
Mon cœur en vain pâtit.
Le bon Dieu me dit: Chante,
Chante, pauvre petit!

Chanter, ou je m'abuse,
Est ma tâche ici-bas.
Tous ceux qu'ainsi j'amuse
Ne m'aimeront-ils pas?
Quand un cercle m'enchante,
Quand le vin divertit,
Le bon Dieu me dit: Chante,
Chante, pauvre petit!

III

Le Petit Homme Rouge

Air : *C'est le gros Thomas.*

Foin des mécontents !
Comme balayeuse on me loge,
Depuis quarante ans,
Dans le château, près de l'horloge.
Or, mes enfants, sachez
Que là, pour mes péchés,
Du coin d'où le soir je ne bouge,
J'ai vu le petit homme rouge.
Saints du paradis,
Priez pour Charles dix.

Vous figurez-vous
Ce diable habillé d'écarlate ?
Bossu, louche et roux,
Un serpent lui sert de cravate.
Il a le nez crochu ;
Il a le pied fourchu ;
Sa voix rauque, en chantant, présage
Au château grand remû-ménage.
Saints du paradis,
Priez pour Charles dix.

Je le vis, hélas !
En quatre-vingt-douze apparaître.
Nobles et prélats
Abandonnaient notre bon maître.
L'homme rouge venait
En sabots, en bonnets.
M'endormais-je un peu sur ma chaise,
Il entonnait la *Marseillaise.*
Saints du paradis
Priez pour Charles dix.

J'eus à balayer ;
Mais lui bientôt par la gouttière
Revint m'effrayer
Pour ce bon monsieur Robespierre.

Lors il était poudré,
Parlait mieux qu'un curé,
Ou, comme riant de lui-même,
Chantait l'hymne à l'*Être suprême.*
Saints du paradis,
Priez pour Charles dix.

Depuis la terreur
Plus n'y pensais, lorsque sa vue
Du bon Empereur
M'annonça la chute imprévue.
En toque il avait mis
Vingt plumets ennemis,
Et chantait au son d'une vielle
Vive Henri Quatre! et *Gabrielle.*
Saints du paradis,
Priez pour Charles dix.

Soyez donc instruits,
Enfants, mais qu'ailleurs on l'ignore,
Que depuis trois nuits
L'homme rouge apparaît encore.
Criant d'un air moqueur,
Il chante comme au chœur,
Baise la terre, et puis ensuite
Met un grand chapeau de jésuite.
Saints du paradis,
Priez pour Charles dix.

IV.

Les Bohémiens

Air : *Mon pèr' m'a donné un mari.*

Sorciers, bateleurs ou filous,
Reste immonde
D'un ancien monde;
Sorciers, bateleurs ou filous,
Gais bohémiens, que voulez-vous

D'où nous venons ? l'on n'en sait rien.
L'hirondelle
D'où nous vient-elle ?
D'où nous venons ? l'on n'en sait rien.
Où nous irons, le sait-on bien ?

Sans pays, sans prince et sans lois,
Notre vie
Doit faire envie ;
Sans pays, sans prince et sans lois,
L'homme est heureux un jour sur trois.

Tous indépendants nous naissons,
Sans église
Qui nous baptise ;
Tous indépendants nous naissons,
Au bruit du fifre et des chansons.

Nos premiers pas sont dégagés,
Dans ce monde
Où l'erreur abonde ;
Nos premiers pas sont dégagés
Du vieux maillot des préjugés.

Au peuple, en butte à nos larcins,
Tout grimoire
En peut faire accroire ;
Au peuple, en butte à nos larcins,
Il faut des sorciers et des saints.

Trouvons-nous Plutus en chemin,
Notre bande
Gaiement demande ;
Trouvons-nous Plutus en chemin,
En chantant nous tendons la main.

Pauvres oiseaux que Dieu bénit,
De la ville
Qu'on nous exile ;
Pauvres oiseaux que Dieu bénit,
Au fond des bois pend notre nid.

A tâtons l'Amour, chaque nuit,
Nous attelle
Tous pêle-mêle;
A tâtons l'Amour, chaque unit,
Nous attelle au char qu'il conduit.

Ton œil ne peut se détacher,
Philosophe
De mince étoffe;
Ton œil ne peut se détacher
Du vieux coq de ton vieux clocher.

Voir, c'est avoir. Allons courir!
Vie errante
Est chose enivrante.
Voir, c'est avoir. Allons courir!
Car tout voir, c'est tout conquérir.

Mais à l'homme on crie en tout lieu,
Qu'il s'agite
Ou croupisse au gîte;
Mais à l'homme on crie en tout lieu:
'Tu nais, bonjour; tu meurs, adieu.'

Quand nous mourrons, vieux ou bambin,
Homme ou femme
A Dieu soit notre âme!
Quand nous mourrons, vieux ou bambin,
On vend le corps au carabin.

Nous n'avons donc, exempts d'orgueil,
De lois vaines,
De lourdes chaînes:
Nous n'avons donc, exempts d'orgueil,
Ni berceau, ni toit, ni cercueil.

Mais, croyez-en notre gaieté,
Noble ou prêtre,
Valet ou maître:
Mais, croyez-en notre gaieté,
Le bonheur, c'est la liberté.

Oui, croyez-en notre gaieté,
Noble ou prêtre,
Valet ou maître ;
Oui, croyez-en notre gaieté,
Le bonheur, c'est la liberté.

V

Le Vieux Caporal

Air *du Vilain* ou de *Ninon chez Madame de Sévigné.*

En avant ! partez, camarades,
L'arme au bras, le fusil chargé.
J'ai ma pipe et vos embrassades ;
Venez me donner mon congé.
J'eus tort de vieillir au service ;
Mais pour vous tous, jeunes soldats,
J'étais un père à l'exercice. (*Bis.*)
Conscrits, au pas ;
Ne pleurez pas ;
Ne pleurez pas ;
Marchez au pas,
Au pas, au pas, au pas, au pas !

Un morveux d'officier m'outrage ;
Je lui fends ! . . . Il vient d'en guérir.
On me condamne, c'est l'usage :
Le vieux caporal doit mourir.
Poussé d'humeur et de rogomme,
Rien n'a pu retenir mon bras.
Puis, moi, j'ai servi le grand homme.
Conscrits, au pas, etc.

Conscrits, vous ne troquerez guères
Bras ou jambe contre une croix.
J'ai gagné la mienne à ces guerres
Où nous bousculions tous les rois.

Chacun de vous payait à boire
Quand je racontais nos combats.
Ce que c'est pourtant que la gloire!
Conscrits, au pas, etc.

Robert, enfant de mon village,
Retourne garder tes moutons.
Tiens, de ces jardins vois l'ombrage:
Avril fleurit mieux nos cantons.
Dans nos bois souvent dès l'aurore
J'ai déniché de frais appas . . .
Bon Dieu! ma mère existe encore!
Conscrits, au pas, etc.

Qui là-bas sanglote et regarde?
Eh! c'est la veuve du tambour.
En Russie, à l'arrière-garde,
J'ai porté son fils nuit et jour.
Comme le père, enfant et femme
Sans moi restaient sous les frimas.
Elle va prier pour mon âme.
Conscrits, au pas, etc.

Morbleu! ma pipe s'est éteinte.
Non, pas encore . . . Allons, tant mieux!
Nous allons entrer dans l'enceinte;
Ça, ne me bandez pas les yeux.
Mes amis, fâché de la peine;
Surtout, ne tirez pas trop bas;
Et qu'au pays Dieu vous ramène! (*Bis.*)
Conscrits, au pas;
Ne pleurez pas,
Ne pleurez pas;
Marchez au pas,
Au pas, au pas, au pas, au pas!

CASIMIR DELAVIGNE

1793-1843

THE son of a shipowner at Le Havre, Delavigne was educated in Paris, began versifying early, and had hardly left school when he competed with all the poetasters in France for official recognition by a poem on the birth of the King of Rome, which Napoleon rewarded with a post in the Civil Service. But his name was unknown to the public until the appearance, after Waterloo, of the first *Messéniennes* (the title was borrowed from the civil wars of ancient Greece), which expressed sincerely, within the limits of a superannuated rhetoric and a cautious temper, the indignation of a people bidden to forget its glories and applaud its own defeat. These classical odes immediately won an admiration which was almost a national gratitude. The collection was swollen in the years which followed by a considerable number of other poems suggested by events of the day—the death of the Emperor, the Greek War of Independence, the funeral of General Foy;—and the revolution in 1830, with similar crises in other parts of Europe, inspired the bulk of the later volume called *Chants Populaires*. *Derniers Chants*, lyrics and stories from Italy, where he travelled extensively, show another side of his poetical talent. But Delavigne is remembered particularly as a dramatist, and among his dramatic works it is not so much the once famous *Vêpres Siciliennes* or the melodrama *Louis XI.*, as his witty and elegant comedies (*L'École des Vieillards*, *La Parisienne*, *La Popularité*) which deserve to live. His personal character did not want dignity—as a poet of the opposition he refused a pension from Charles the Tenth. He had material independence, precarious health, lived much in the south, and died comparatively young at Lyons.

The young writers of the 'twenties grouped round the eclectic Nodier included Delavigne's among the romantic reputations; but it has long been recognised that, if in many of his plays he accepted certain innovations of the time, as a poet he has nothing in common with his younger contemporaries except, it may be, a loftier ideal of the poet's function, and, when his subject moves him, a somewhat greater energy of expression, than belonged to the preceding period. He had little originality, but a timid reverence for academical models, and his conception of the Ode is in essentials that of

J.-B. Rousseau. His vocabulary is less infested by abstractions than that of the eighteenth-century poets in general, his rimes have more force and spontaneity; but he is addicted to periphrasis, shares the mythological superstition and is incapable of sustained passion, though not of a certain vehemence. The merit of composition, the science of transitions, smoothness and taste may be conceded to him, and he knew his language well.

VI

La Dévastation du Musée et des Monuments

La sainte vérité qui m'échauffe et m'inspire
Écarte et foule aux pieds les voiles imposteurs :
Ma muse de nos maux flétrira les auteurs,
    Dussé-je voir briser ma lyre
Par le glaive insolent de nos libérateurs.
Où vont ces chars pesants conduits par leurs cohortes ?
Sous les voûtes du Louvre ils marchent à pas lents :
    Ils s'arrêtent devant ses portes ;
Viennent-ils lui ravir ses sacrés ornements ?

Muses, penchez vos têtes abattues :
Du siècle de Léon les chefs-d'œuvre divins
Sous un ciel sans clarté suivront les froids Germains ;
Les vaisseaux d'Albion attendent nos statues.
    Des profanateurs inhumains
Vont-ils anéantir tant de veilles savantes ?
Porteront-ils le fer sur les toiles vivantes
    Que Raphaël anima de ses mains ?

Dieu du jour, Dieu des vers, ils brisent ton image.
C'en est fait : la victoire et la divinité
    Ne couronneront plus ton visage
    D'une double immortalité.
C'en est fait : loin de toi jette un arc inutile.
Non, tu n'inspiras point le vieux chantre d'Achille ;
Non, tu n'es pas le dieu qui vengea les neuf Sœurs
    Des fureurs d'un monstre sauvage,
Toi qui n'as pas un trait pour venger ton outrage
    Et terrasser tes ravisseurs.

Le deuil est aux bosquets de Gnide.
Muet, pâle et le front baissé,
L'Amour, que la guerre intimide,
Éteint son flambeau renversé.

Des Grâces la troupe légère
L'interroge sur ses douleurs :
Il leur dit en versant des pleurs :
'J'ai vu Mars outrager ma mère.'

Je crois entendre encore les clameurs des soldats
Entraînant la jeune immortelle :
Le fer a mutilé ses membres délicats ;
Hélas, elle semblait, et plus chaste et plus belle,
Cacher sa honte entre leurs bras.
Dans un fort pris d'assaut, telle une vierge en larmes,
Aux yeux des forcenés dont l'insolente ardeur
Déchira les tissus qui dérobaient ses charmes,
Se voile encor de sa pudeur.

Adieu, débris fameux de Grèce et d'Ausonie,
Et vous, tableaux errants de climats en climats ;
Adieu, Corrège, Albane, immortal Phidias !
Adieu, les arts et le génie !

Noble France, pardonne ! A tes pompeux travaux,
Aux Pujet, aux Lebrun, ma douleur fait injure.
David a ramené son siècle à la Nature :
Parmi ses nourrissons il compte des rivaux . . .
Laissons-la s'élever, cette école nouvelle !
Le laurier de David de lauriers entouré,
Fier de ses rejetons, enfante un bois sacré
Qui protège les arts de son ombre éternelle.

Le marbre animé parle aux yeux :
Une autre Vénus plus féconde,
Près d'Hercule victorieux,
Étend son flambeau sur le monde.

Ajax, de son pied furieux,
Insulte au flot qui se retire;
L'œil superbe, un bras dans les cieux,
Il s'élance, et je l'entends dire:
'J'échapperai malgré les dieux.'

Mais quels monceaux de morts! que de spectres livides!
Ils tombent dans Jaffa ces vieux soldats français
Qui réveillaient naguère, au bruit de leurs succès,
Les siècles entassés au fond des Pyramides.
Ah! fuyons ces bords meurtriers!
D'où te vient, Austerlitz, l'éclat qui t'environne?
Qui dois-je couronner du peintre ou des guerriers?
Les guerriers et le peintre ont droit à la couronne.
Des chefs-d'œuvre français naissent de toutes parts;
Ils surprennent mon cœur à d'invincibles charmes:
Au Déluge, en tremblant, j'applaudis par mes larmes;
Didon enchante mes regards;

Versant sur un beau corps sa clarté caressante
A travers le feuillage un faible et doux rayon
Porte les baisers d'une amante
Sur les lèvres d'Endymion;
De son flambeau vengeur Némésis m'épouvante;
Je frémis avec Phèdre, et n'ose interroger
L'accusé dédaigneux qui semble la juger.
Je vois Léonidas. O courage! ô patrie!
Trois cents héros sont morts dans ce détroit fameux:
Trois cents! quel souvenir!... Je pleure... et je m'écrie:
Dix-huit mille Français ont expiré comme eux!

Oui: j'en suis fier encor: ma patrie est l'asile,
Elle est le temple des beaux arts:
A l'ombre de nos étendarts,
Ils reviendront ces dieux que la fortune exile.

L'étranger, qui nous trompe, écrase impunément
La justice et la foi sous le glaive étouffées;
Il ternit pour jamais sa splendeur d'un moment;
Il triomphe en barbare et brise nos trophées:

Que cet orgueil est misérable et vain !
Croit-il anéantir tous nos titres de gloire ?
On peut les effacer sur le marbre ou l'airain ;
Qui les effacera du livre de l'histoire ?
Ah ! tant que le soleil luira sur vos états,
Il en doit éclairer d'impérissables marques :
Comment disparaîtront, ô superbes monarques,
Ces champs où les lauriers croissaient pour nos soldats ?
Allez, détruisez donc tant de cités royales
Dont les clefs d'or suivaient nos pompes triomphales ;
Comblez ces fleuves écumants
Qui nous ont opposé d'impuissantes barrières ;
Aplanissez ces monts dont les rochers fumants
Tremblaient sous nos foudres guerrières.
Voilà nos monuments : c'est là que nos exploits
Redoutent peu l'orgueil d'une injuste victoire :
Le fer, le feu, le temps plus puissant que les rois
Ne peut rien contre leur mémoire.

[*Messéniennes.*

VII

La Villa Adrienne

Rome

En paix sous les ombrages
Du palais d'Adrien,
Errez, buffle sauvage ;
César n'en saura rien.

Plus de gardes fidèles
Au seuil de ces vergers !
Ils n'ont pour sentinelles
Que les chiens des bergers.

Mais ce palais superbe,
Quel bois peut le cacher ?
— Passant, plus loin, sous l'herbe,
C'est là qu'il faut chercher.

Merci, merci, vieux pâtre !
Et ces marbres épars,
Quels sont-ils ? — Au théâtre,
La loge des Césars.

— Mais de leurs bains antiques
Où trouvez les débris ?
— Parmi ces mosaïques,
Où boivent mes brebis.

— En quel lieu sur l'arène
Luttaient les chars rivaux ?
—Où tu vois dans la plaine
Courir ces deux chevreaux.

— De Tempé quels bocages
Ont porté le doux nom ?
— Tempé n'a plus d'ombrages;
Mais c'était là, dit-on.

— L'Alphée au moins serpente
Entre ces deux coteaux ?
— Non; je m'assieds et chante
Où serpentaient ses eaux.

Grèce, qu'un frais bocage
Ici vit refleurir,
Même dans ton image
Tu devais donc mourir.

Non, tu n'as plus d'asile:
Le lierre en ces vallons
A tes dieux qu'on exile
Offre seul des festons.

De ta noble poussière
Ses rameaux sont amis;
Mais il n'est que le lierre
De fidèle aux débris.

Prends ce faible salaire,
Berger, c'est moins que rien:
Prends, et bois pour me plaire
A César Adrien.

[*Poèmes et Ballades sur l'Italie.*

MARCELINE DESBORDES-VALMORE

1786-1859

Marceline Desbordes was born at Douai two or three years before the Revolution, by which her father, an ecclesiastical and heraldic artist, lost his patrons. Misfortune and poverty clouded her childhood. When she was fourteen, her mother, hoping to mend the family fortunes, sailed with Marceline for Guadeloupe, where a relative was settled: they found the island in a blaze of insurrection, the cousin fled; and Madame Desbordes soon succumbed to yellow fever, leaving the girl to find her way back alone. When, a little later, it was necessary to earn her living, as she could sing and had a graceful person, she turned to the stage: but the loss of her voice interrupted her career, and it was to console herself that she began to rime untaught. She had already married Valmore the actor when, in 1818, she was persuaded to publish a small volume, *Élégies et Romances*, which was well received and followed by *Élégies et poésies nouvelles* in 1825. The rest of her life was uneventful: it was filled by her children, to whom she was devoted, her poetry, and her friends, among whom she counted some of the famous writers of her time.

Madame Desbordes-Valmore is not only the most feminine of women poets in the nineteenth century. She is the first in time of the *personal lyrists* of France, and the first to express passion. Tenderness, delicacy, spontaneity are the notes of all her writing; and in spite of her negligences, she sometimes finds perfect expression by her instinct of harmony and the force of her absolute sincerity.

Her later volumes are: *Fleurs*, 1834; *Pauvres Fleurs*, 1839; *Bouquets et Prières*, 1843.—*Œuvres Complètes*, 2 vols. Paris: Lemerre.

VIII

L'Attente

Il m'aima. C'est alors que sa voix adorée
M'éveilla tout entière, et m'annonça l'amour!
Comme la vigne aimante en secret attirée
Par l'ormeau caressant, qu'elle embrasse à son tour,

Je l'aimai ! D'un sourire il obtenait mon âme.
Que ses yeux étaient doux ! que j'y lisais d'aveux !
Quand il brûlait mon cœur d'une si tendre flamme,
Comment, sans me parler, me disait-il : 'Je veux !'
O toi qui m'enchantais, savais-tu ton empire ?
L'éprouvais-tu, ce mal, ce bien dont je soupire ?
Je le crois : tu parlais comme on parle en aimant,
Quand ta bouche m'apprit je ne sais quel serment.
Qu'importent les serments ? Je n'étais plus moi-même,
J'étais toi. J'écoutais, j'imitais ce que j'aime ;
Mes lèvres, loin de toi, retenaient tes accents,
Et ta voix dans ma voix troublait encor mes sens.
Je ne l'imite plus ; je me tais, et mes larmes
De tous mes biens perdus ont expié les charmes.
Attends-moi, m'as-tu dit : j'attends, j'attends toujours !
L'été, j'attends de toi la grâce des beaux jours ;
L'hiver aussi, j'attends ! Fixée à ma fenêtre,
Sur le chemin désert je crois te reconnaître ;
Mais les sentiers rompus ont effrayé tes pas :
Quand ton cœur me cherchait, tu ne les voyais pas.
Ainsi le temps prolonge et nourrit ma souffrance :
Hier, c'est le regret ; demain, c'est l'espérance.
Chaque désir trahi me rend à la douleur,
Et jamais, jamais au bonheur !
Le soir, à l'horizon, où s'égare ma vue,
Tu m'apparais encore, et j'attends malgré moi :
La nuit tombe . . . ce n'est plus toi ;
Non ! c'est le songe qui me tue.
Il me tue, et je l'aime ! et je veux en gémir !
Mais sur ton cœur jamais ne pourrai-je dormir
De ce sommeil profond qui rafraîchit la vie ?
Le repos sur ton cœur, c'est le ciel que j'envie !
Et le ciel irrité met l'absence entre nous.
Ceux qui le font parler me l'ont dit à moi-même :
Il ne veut pas qu'on aime !
Mon Dieu, je n'ose plus aimer qu'à vos genoux.

Qu'ai-je dit ? Notre amour, c'est le ciel sur la terre.
Il fut, j'en crois mon cœur, effrayé d'un remords,
Comme la vie, involontaire,
Inévitable, hélas ! comme la mort.
J'ai goûté cet amour : j'en pleure les délices.
Cher amant ! quand mon sein palpita sous ton sein,
Nos deux âmes étaient complices,
Et tu gardas la mienne, heureuse du larcin.
Oh ! ne me la rends plus ! que cette âme enchaînée
Triste et passionnée,
Heureuse de se perdre et d'errer après toi,
Te cherche, te rappelle et t'entraîne vers moi.

[*Élégies.*

ALPHONSE DE LAMARTINE

1790-1869

The father of Lamartine was a younger son of an old Burgundy family married to the daughter of an ex-comptroller in the household of Duke Philippe-Égalité—a good country gentleman who somehow fell into a revolutionary gaol not long after the poet's birth at Mâcon, and was only delivered by the fall of Robespierre. Alphonse and his sisters grew up at Milly in idyllic surroundings: Madame de Lamartine was a tender mother, deeply pious and a little romantic. His schoolmasters were the Fathers of the Faith at Belley. After leaving school, he spent four years at home in fruitful idleness, nursing a passion for the country, writing verses every day, reading the Bible, Tasso, Petrarch, Racine, J.-J. Rousseau, Parny, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre and MacPherson's Ossian: the influence of all these is discoverable in his writings.

In 1811 Lamartine's parents sent him to recover in Italy from a disappointed fancy: he visited the great cities, but stayed longest in and near Naples, where the episode happened which the tale of *Graziella* records with, perhaps, some unconscious injustice to his own character. He came back and was well received in Paris drawing-rooms; then, on the first return of Lewis XVIII., obtained a commission in the Body-Guard. It was disbanded during the Hundred Days, and the young ensign did not serve again.

At Aix-les-Bains in 1816 he met Madame Charles, the wife of a well-known scientist—the Julie of *Raphaël* and the original Elvire of his early poetry, though he gave the same name to other shapes. The romantic friendship with this lady ripened in Paris in 1817; her death in the following year was an ineffaceable sorrow. The lyrics directly inspired by this affection are unquestionably the happiest and the most sincere in the little volume, *Méditations poétiques et religieuses*, which took the French public by storm on its appearance at the beginning of 1820. It was as sudden and as significant a triumph as Byron's had been;—and the French poet's fame was won by his first effort! The most practical result was a diplomatic post, which had been his ambition for some time. With his marriage—his wife was an Englishwoman, Miss Birch—and a considerable

inheritance from an uncle, Lamartine's good fortune, at the age of thirty, seemed complete.

He went as *attaché* to Naples, as secretary of embassy to London, thence to Florence, where he represented his country in the Minister's absence, and found leisure to swell the proportions of his first book and to prepare two others—a hasty paraphrase from the *Phaedo*, *La Mort de Socrate*, and a second series of *Méditations*, which was well received, though it could not startle the world like its predecessor; and when Charles the Tenth succeeded his brother, Lamartine did homage with *Le Chant du Sacre*—in which an unlucky allusion to the regicide vote of Égalité embroiled the poet for ever (the point has some historical importance) with the future King of the French. Another poem published almost at the same time, in 1825, and occasioned by the death of Byron, *Le Dernier Chant du Pèlerinage d'Harold*, contained a casual reflexion upon the Italian people which gave great offence: the upshot was a duel with a Tuscan officer. Lamartine became an Academician in 1829; he published his *Harmonies poétiques* in 1830; and, on the fall of King Charles, very honourably threw up his diplomatic prospects.

Having vainly sought election to Parliament, Lamartine started with his wife and daughter for the East. This pilgrimage, which included Athens, Lebanon, the Holy Land, Damascus, Baalbek, and Constantinople, was accomplished under comfortable and even sumptuous conditions, which contrasted with the hardships of Chateaubriand's wanderings; and the book which narrates it is, in spite of fine passages, extremely inferior to the great *Itinéraire*. On the way, at Beyrout, the poet's daughter died—a terrible blow; and in his absence he was returned to the Chamber as deputy for Bergues.

He very quickly won a reputation as an orator; but his part in politics was a modest one for several years. He began by supporting Louis-Philippe's government; was, like the great majority of Frenchmen, gradually estranged by the irksome and unimaginative system it pursued; and became a political personage only on the eve of the King's dethronement. During this period poetry had become a secondary occupation: yet it was while he was making his mark in the Chamber that he wrote and published his two great narrative poems, fragments of a tremendous project—*Jocelyn* (1835) and *La Chute d'un Ange* (very ill received in 1838), as well as another volume of lyrics, *Recueillements poétiques* (1839). This was his last

book of poetry. The upheaval of 1848 gave him, largely through the mutual jealousy of rival democrats, a place in the Provisional Government which his towering eloquence, courage and presence of mind made instantly predominant. As minister for foreign affairs in a government he had joined without positive Republican convictions, Lamartine, during several weeks, incarnated the spirit of the Republic in the minds of his countrymen. This is not the place to examine his political career, or the question whether the disquieting vagueness of his formulas, his vanity and ignorance of men, had as much to do with his sudden eclipse as the defection of colleagues and the persistency of a popular tide which noble words could not permanently stem. With the *journées de juin* his authority crumbled: within a year he was merely a private member. The authors of the *coup d'État* did not even think it necessary to molest him: at the establishment of the new Empire he retired from politics altogether.

He had published an *Histoire des Girondins*, compiled chiefly at second hand, just before the Revolution; in the year of his failure, 1849, he showed a strange contempt for timeliness with the successive appearance of his *Confidences*, *Graziella*, *Raphaël*, three books of indiscreet and self-complacent autobiography. Henceforth, though a few more strophes fell from him, his publications were all to be prose, and not even imaginative prose. He had always been extravagant and careless, had run through his own fortune and his wife's and his considerable earnings from literature. Politics completed his financial ruin; and the rest of his life offers the depressing spectacle of a great man eking out a bare subsistence in old age by literary drudgery. Lamartine's History of the Restoration, his History of the Turkish Empire, his Life of Cicero, his *Cours familier de littérature*, are much better forgotten, as they are. It was only by the humiliating acceptance of a handsome grant from the Imperial government that his last years were freed from sordid embarrassment. Having lived long in comparative seclusion, he died almost unlamented, save by the peasantry of Saint-Point, his last home.

It is not difficult to explain why Lamartine's fine achievement in poetry is still so commonly exaggerated. He is without doubt the most *poetical* of French poets—that is, the personality his writings reflect answers most completely to the expectations popularly attached to the name. And if the tears of his readers were the one measure of a poet's powers, and his capacity to communicate his own emotions

sufficed, how few could even be called his rivals! His example permanently raised the temperature of the French lyric to a fervour it had hardly known, and vindicated at a blow the immeasurable superiority of passion to opinion as the stuff of poetry. With the appearance of *Les Méditations*, the conception of nature as the witness, accomplice and consoler of human vicissitudes, and of poetry as the sacred tongue of personal confidences, won a victory the more easy as the themes and the emotional quality of the volume were singularly apt to flatter the taste of the cultivated Restoration public, fresh from admiring the chlorotic melancholy of Millevoye, the delicious artlessness of Marceline Desbordes. The vague but persistent rapture of a religion without definite faith, beginning and ending in wonder, the sighs of a love-laden memory, and all the circumstances of a picturesque and premature despair, offered a rich pasturage for exceptional gifts—melody, an intonation unhesitatingly true, the instinct of the sublime, above all amplitude and eloquence. Lamartine's early poetry shines with the transparent sincerity of unconscious egoism: the lyrical collections which followed were recommencements or expatiations inevitably less spontaneous. On the other hand they are frequently superior in craftsmanship, a thing which the poet (with quite as much candour as fatuity) all his life professed to disdain. Emulation rather than self-criticism had braced the languor of his lines and lent more intensity to his vision of the outer world. 'Les Préludes' in the second series of *Méditations* written in friendly rivalry with the author of *Les Orientales*, and the greater number of poems in *Les Harmonies*, certainly excel the pieces with which he first won fame in point of technical accomplishment. In the latter collection, too, he shows himself the master of his thoughts and capable of severer composition: the expression has acquired density without losing its inimitable grace. *Les Recueillements* marked no further progress in these respects; but perhaps he never wrote finer verses than the great lyrical interlude 'Les Laboureurs' in *Jocelyn*. As a whole that story is more notable as being one of the very few poems of epical proportions undertaken by modern French poets than for its construction, which is diffuse, or its psychology, which is feeble and indeed absurd, or its actual execution, too frequently lymphatic and negligent. Complete in itself and founded it is supposed on the confidences of a country priest, the poet's friend and neighbour, *Jocelyn* was intended by Lamartine for nothing more than one episode in a vast plan—the history of two lovers, a son of heaven and a

daughter of man, carried on from age to age of human development by the machinery of metempsychosis. *La Chute d'un Ange* was another episode in the same plan, never completed: a poem more evidently a fragment, and bearing more exasperating signs of distraction in its notorious lapses of rime, but in many ways far finer than *Jocelyn*, more vigorous in conception, abounding in splendid descriptive passages, and breathing a really epical spirit. A certain similarity in design which connects *La Chute d'un Ange* with Vigny's *Eloa* on one hand, and on the other with the posthumous and fragmentary masterpiece of Hugo, *La Fin de Satan*, has been often noticed.

Lamartine, a man of real and multifarious genius, wanted the scruple of artistic perfection, the spirit of artistic devotion: that is his irremediable shortcoming as a poet. He held that poetry is not an exacting vocation, but an occasional expansion, depending for its sincerity upon spasmodic and involuntary inspiration; and it happened that the character of his gifts and of his limitations gave an apparent justification to that view. He is the poet of superb improvisations. His originality lay wholly in the intensity with which he could translate his moods, not at all in the force of an imagination which could provoke, prolong and govern them. His imagery is habitually hazy; the very formula of his metaphors is successive: he felt, and then he sought a sensible interpretation of his thought. He had no part in the exploration of rhythms or the renovation of the language, though he showed himself supple enough to assimilate, when he chose, the conquests of his contemporaries on the technical side of his art; but his authentic vocabulary, largely abstract, is no younger than that of Rousseau, and his handling of the Alexandrine is usually more timid than Racine's. He had, however, a wonderfully delicate ear, and was incapable of cacophony. Monotony, in a particular sense, is an essential part of his charm: he had movement without variety; and he is a master of periods rather than of rhythms.—Finally, this praise belongs to the poetry of Lamartine, that it creates its own atmosphere and imposes the momentary illusion by which genius appears to us as a quality of the heart.

The poetry of Lamartine is best read in the edition published by Félix Juven, Paris. His complete works, except the *Cours familier de Littérature*, were comprehended in forty volumes published in 1860-63. A volume of *Poésies inédites* was brought out by his disciple, Victor de Laprade.

IX

L'Isolement

Souvent sur la montagne, à l'ombre du vieux chêne,
Au coucher du soleil, tristement je m'assieds ;
Je promène au hasard mes regards sur la plaine,
Dont le tableau changeant se déroule à mes pieds.

Ici gronde le fleuve aux vagues écumantes ;
Il serpente, et s'enfonce en un lointain obscur ;
Là le lac immobile étend ses eaux dormantes
Où l'étoile du soir se lève dans l'azur.

Au sommet de ces monts couronnés de bois sombres,
Le crépuscule encor jette un dernier rayon ;
Et le char vaporeux de la reine des ombres
Monte, et blanchit déjà les bords de l'horizon.

Cependant, s'élançant de la flèche gothique,
Un son religieux se répand dans les airs :
Le voyageur s'arrête, et la cloche rustique
Aux derniers bruits du jour mêle les saints concerts.

Mais à ces deux tableaux mon âme indifférente
N'éprouve devant eux ni charme ni transports ;
Je contemple la tiare ainsi qu'une ombre errante :
Le soleil des vivants n'échauffe pas les morts.

De colline en colline en vain portant ma vue,
Du sud à l'aquilon, de l'aurore au couchant,
Je parcours tous les points de l'immense étendue
Et je dis : 'Nulle part le bonheur ne m'attend.'

Que me font ces vallons, ces palais, ces chaumières,
Vains objets dont pour moi le charme est envolé ?
Fleuves, rochers, forêts, solitudes si chères,
Un seul être vous manque, et tout est dépeuplé !

Que le tour du soleil ou commence ou s'achève,
D'un œil indifférent je le suis dans son cours ;
En un ciel sombre ou pur qu'il se couche ou se lève,
Qu'importe le soleil ? je n'attends rien des jours.

Quand je pourrais le suivre en sa vaste carrière,
Mes yeux verraient partout le vide et les déserts :
Je ne désire rien de tout ce qu'il éclaire ;
Je ne demande rien à l'immense univers.

Mais peut-être au delà des bornes de sa sphère,
Lieux où le vrai soleil éclaire d'autres cieux,
Si je pouvais laisser ma dépouille à la terre,
Ce que j'ai tant rêvé paraîtrait à mes yeux !

Là, je m'enivrerais à la source ou j'aspire ;
Là, je retrouverais et l'espoir et l'amour.
Et ce bien idéal que toute âme désire,
Et qui n'a pas de nom au terrestre séjour !

Que ne puis-je, porté sur le char de l'Aurore,
Vague objet de mes vœux, m'élancer jusqu'à toi !
Sur la terre d'exil pourquoi resté-je encore ?
Il n'est rien de commun entre la terre et moi.

Quand la feuille des bois tombe dans la prairie,
Le vent du soir s'élève et l'arrache aux vallons ;
Et moi, je suis semblable à la feuille flétrie :
Emportez-moi comme elle, orageux aquilons !

[*Premières Méditations poétiques.*

X

Le Soir

Le soir ramène le silence.
Assis sur ces rochers déserts,
Je suis dans le vague des airs
Le char de la nuit qui s'avance

Vénus se lève à l'horizon ;
A mes pieds l'étoile amoureuse
De sa lueur mystérieuse
Blanchit les tapis de gazon.

De ce hêtre au feuillage sombre
J'entends frissonner les rameaux :
On dirait autour des tombeaux
Qu'on entend voltiger une ombre.

Tout à coup, détaché des cieux,
Un rayon de l'astre nocturne,
Glissant sur mon front taciturne,
Vient mollement toucher mes yeux.

Doux reflet d'un globe de flamme,
Charmant rayon, que me veux-tu ?
Viens-tu dans mon sein abattu
Porter la lumière à mon âme ?

Descends-tu pour me révéler
Des mondes le divin mystère,
Ces secrets cachés dans la sphère
Où le jour va te rappeler ?

Une secrète intelligence
T'adresse-t-elle aux malheureux ?
Viens-tu, la nuit, briller sur eux
Comme un rayon de l'espérance ?

Viens-tu dévoiler l'avenir
Au cœur fatigué qui l'implore ?
Rayon divin, es-tu l'aurore
Du jour qui ne doit pas finir ?

Mon cœur à ta clarté s'enflamme,
Je sens des transports inconnus,
Je songe à ceux qui ne sont plus :
Douce lumière, es-tu leur âme ?

Peut-être ces mânes heureux
Glissent ainsi sur le bocage.
Enveloppé de leur image
Je crois me sentir plus près d'eux !

Ah ! si c'est vous, ombres chéries,
Loin de la foule et loin du bruit,
Revenez ainsi chaque nuit
Vous mêler à mes rêveries.

Ramenez la paix et l'amour
Au sein de mon âme épuisée,
Comme la nocturne rosée
Qui tombe après les feux du jour.

Venez ! . . . mais des vapeurs funèbres
Montent des bords de l'horizon :
Elles voilent le doux rayon
Et tout rentre dans les ténèbres.

[*Premières Méditations poétiques.*

XI

L'ENTHOUSIASME

Ainsi, quand l'aigle du tonnerre
Enlevait Ganymède aux cieux,
L'enfant, s'attachant à la terre,
Luttait contre l'oiseau des dieux ;
Mais entre ses serres rapides
L'aigle, pressant ses flancs timides,
L'arrachait aux champs paternels ;
Et, sourd à la voix qui l'implore,
Il le jetait, tremblant encore,
Jusques aux pieds des immortels.

Ainsi quand tu fonds sur mon âme,
Enthousiasme, aigle vainqueur,
Au bruit de tes ailes de flamme
Je frémis d'une sainte horreur ;

Je me débats sous ta puissance,
Je fuis, je crains que ta présence
N'anéantisse un cœur mortel.
Comme un feu que la foudre allume,
Qui ne s'éteint plus, et consume
Le bûcher, le temple et l'autel.

Mais à l'essor de la pensée
L'instinct des sens s'oppose en vain :
Sous le dieu mon âme oppressée
Bondit, s'élance, et bat mon sein.
La foudre en mes veines circule :
Étonné du feu qui me brûle,
Je l'irrite en le combattant,
Et la lave de mon génie
Déborde en torrents d'harmonie,
Et me consume en s'échappant.

Muse, contemple la victime !
Ce n'est plus ce front inspiré,
Ce n'est plus ce regard sublime
Qui lançait un rayon sacré :
Sous ta dévorante influence
A peine un reste d'existence
A ma jeunesse est échappé.
Mon front, que la pâleur efface
Ne conserve plus que la trace
De la foudre qui m'a frappé.

Heureux le poète insensible !
Son luth n'est point baigné de pleurs ;
Son enthousiasme paisible
N'a point ces tragiques fureurs.
De sa veine féconde et pure
Coulent, avec nombre et mesure,
Des ruisseaux de lait et de miel ;
Et ce pusillanime Icare,
Trahi par l'aile de Pindare
Ne retombe jamais du ciel.

Mais nous, pour embraser les âmes,
Il faut brûler, il faut ravir
Au ciel jaloux ses triples flammes :
Pour tout peindre, il faut tout sentir.
Foyers brûlants de la lumière,
Nos cœurs de la nature entière
Doivent concentrer les rayons ;
Et l'on accuse notre vie !
Mais ce flambeau qu'on nous envie
S'allume au feu des passions.

Non, jamais un sein pacifique
N'enfanta ces divins élans,
Ni ce désordre sympathique
Qui soumet le monde à nos chants.
Non, non, quand l'Apollon d'Homère,
Pour lancer ses traits sur la terre,
Descendait des sommets d'Éryx,
Volant aux rives infernales,
Il trempait ses armes fatales
Dans les eaux bouillantes du Styx.

Descendez de l'auguste cime
Qu'indignent de lâches transports !
Ce n'est que d'un luth magnanime
Que partent les divins accords.
Le cœur des enfants de la lyre
Ressemble au marbre qui soupire
Sur le sépulcre de Memnon :
Pour lui donner la voix et l'âme,
Il faut que de sa chaste flamme
L'œil du jour lui lance un rayon.

Et tu veux qu'éveillant encore
Des feux sous la cendre couverts,
Mon reste d'âme s'évapore
En accents perdus dans les airs !
La gloire est le rêve d'une ombre ;
Elle a trop retranché le nombre

Des jours qu'elle devait charmer.
Tu veux que je lui sacrifie
Ce dernier souffle de ma vie !
Je veux le garder pour aimer.
[*Premières Méditations poétiques.*

XII

Le Lac

Ainsi, toujours poussés vers de nouveaux rivages,
Dans la nuit éternelle emportés sans retour,
Ne pourrons-nous jamais sur l'océan des âges
Jeter l'ancre un seul jour ?

O lac ! l'année à peine a fini sa carrière,
Et près des flots chéris qu'elle devait revoir,
Regarde ! je viens seul m'asseoir sur cette pierre
Où tu la vis s'asseoir !

Tu mugissais ainsi sous ces roches profondes ;
Ainsi tu te brisais sur leurs flancs déchirés ;
Ainsi le vent jetait l'écume de tes ondes
Sur ses pieds adorés.

Un soir, t'en souvient-il ? Nous voguions en silence ;
On n'entendait au loin, sur l'onde et sous les cieux,
Que le bruit des rameurs qui frappaient en cadence
Tes flots harmonieux.

Tout à coup des accents inconnus à le terre
Du rivage charmé frappèrent les échos ;
Le flot fut attentif, et la voix qui m'est chère
Laissa tomber ces mots :

' O temps, suspends ton vol ! et vous, heures propices,
Suspendez votre cours !
Laissez-nous savourer les rapides délices
Des plus beaux de nos jours !

'Assez de malheureux ici-bas vous implorent:
Coulez, coulez pour eux;
Prenez avec leurs jours les soins qui les dévorent;
Oubliez les heureux.

'Mais je demande en vain quelques moments encore,
Le temps m'échappe et fuit;
Je dis à cette nuit: "Sois plus lente"; et l'aurore
Va dissiper la nuit.

'Aimons donc, aimons donc! de l'heure fugitive
Hâtons-nous, jouissons!
L'homme n'a point de port, le temps n'a point de rive;
Il coule, et nous passons!'

Temps jaloux, se peut-il que ces moments d'ivresse,
Où l'amour à longs flots nous versa le bonheur,
S'envolent loin de nous de la même vitesse
Que les jours de malheur?

Hé quoi! n'en pourrons-nous fixer au moins la trace?
Quoi! passés pour jamais? quoi! tout entiers perdus?
Ce temps qui les donna, ce temps qui les efface,
Ne nous les rendra plus?

Éternité, néant, passé, sombres abîmes,
Que faites-vous des jours que vous engloutissez?
Parlez: nous rendrez-vous ces extases sublimes
Que vous nous ravissez?

O lac! rochers muets! grottes! forêt obscure!
Vous que le temps épargne ou qu'il peut rajeunir,
Gardez de cette nuit, gardez, belle nature,
Au moins le souvenir!

Qu'il soit dans ton repos, qu'il soit dans tes orages,
Beau lac, et dans l'aspect de tes riants coteaux,
Et dans ces noirs sapins, et dans ces rocs sauvages
Qui pendent sur tes eaux!

Qu'il soit dans le zéphyr qui frémit et qui passe,
Dans les bruits de tes bords par tes bords répétés,
Dans l'astre au front d'argent qui blanchit ta surface
De ses molles clartés !

Que le vent qui gémit, le roseau qui soupire,
Que les parfums légers de ton air embaumé,
Que tout ce qu'on entend, l'on voit ou l'on respire,
Tout dise : 'Ils ont aimé !'

[*Premières Méditations poétiques.*

XIII

Eh ! qui m'emportera sur des flots sans rivages ?
Quand pourrai-je, la nuit, aux clartés des orages,
Sur un vaisseau sans mâts, au gré des aquilons,
Fendre de l'Océan les liquides vallons,
M'engloutir dans leur sein, m'élancer sur leurs cimes,
Rouler avec la vague au fond des noirs abîmes,
Et, revomi cent fois par les gouffres amers,
Flotter comme l'écume au vaste sein des mers ?
D'effroi, de volupté, tour à tour éperdue,
Cent fois entre la vie et la mort suspendue,
Peut-être que mon âme, au sein de ces horreurs,
Pourrait jouir au moins de ses propres terreurs,
Et, prête à s'abîmer dans la nuit qu'elle ignore,
A la vie un moment se reprendrait encore,
Comme un homme, roulant des sommets d'un rocher,
De ses bras tout sanglants cherche à s'y rattacher.
Mais toujours repasser par une même route,
Voir ses jours épuisés s'écouler goutte à goutte ;
Mais suivre pas à pas dans l'immense troupeau
Ces générations, inutile fardeau,
Qui meurent pour mourir, qui vécurent pour vivre,
Et dont chaque printemps la terre se délivre,
Comme dans nos forêts le chêne avec mépris
Livre au vent des hivers ses feuillages flétris ;
Sans regrets, sans espoir, avancer dans la vie
Comme un vaisseau qui dort sur une onde assoupie ;

Sentir son âme, usée en impuissant effort,
Se ronger lentement sous la rouille du sort;
Penser sans découvrir, aspirer sans atteindre;
Briller sans éclairer, et pâlir sans s'éteindre;
Hélas! tel est mon sort et celui des humains;
Nos pères ont passé par les mêmes chemins;
Chargés du même sort, nos fils prendront nos places;
Ceux qui ne sont pas nés y trouveront leurs traces.
Tout s'use, tout périt, tout passe: mais, hélas!
Excepté les mortels, rien ne change ici-bas.

[*Les Préludes.*

XIV

L'Hymne de la Nuit

Le jour s'éteint sur tes collines,
O terre où languissent mes pas!
Quand pourrez-vous, mes yeux, quand pourrez-vous, hélas!
Saluer les splendeurs divines
Du jour qui ne s'éteindra pas?

Sont-ils ouverts pour les ténèbres
Ces regards altérés du jour?
De son éclat, ô Nuit! à tes ombres funèbres
Pourquoi passent-ils tour à tour?
Mon âme n'est pas lasse encore
D'admirer l'œuvre du Seigneur;
Les élans enflammés de ce sein qui l'adore
N'avaient pas épuisé mon cœur!

Dieu du jour! Dieu des nuits! Dieu de toutes les heures!
Laisse-moi m'envoler sur les feux du soleil!
Où va vers l'occident ce nuage vermeil?
Il va voiler le seuil de tes saintes demeures
Où l'œil ne connaît plus la nuit ni le sommeil!
Cependant ils sont beaux à l'œil de l'espérance
Ces champs du firmament ombragés par la nuit;
Mon Dieu! dans ces déserts mon œil retrouve et suit
Les miracles de ta présence.

Ces chœurs étincelants que ton doigt seul conduit,
Ces océans d'azur où leur foule s'élance,
Ces fanaux allumés de distance en distance,
Cet astre qui paraît, cet astre qui s'enfuit,
Je les comprends, Seigneur ! tout chante, tout m'instruit
Que l'abîme est comblé par ta magnificence,
Que les cieux sont vivants, et que ta providence
Remplit de sa vertu tout ce qu'elle a produit !
Ces flots d'or, d'azur, de lumière,
Ces mondes nébuleux que l'œil ne compte pas,
O mon Dieu, c'est la poussière
Qui s'élève sous tes pas !

O Nuits, déroulez en silence
Les pages du livre des cieux ;
Astres, gravitez en cadence
Dans vos sentiers harmonieux ;
Durant ces heures solennelles,
Aquilons, repliez vos ailes,
Terre, assoupissez vos échos ;
Étends tes vagues sur les plages,
O mer ! et berce les images
Du Dieu qui t'a donné tes flots.

Savez-vous son nom ? La nature
Réunit en vain ses cent voix,
L'étoile à l'étoile murmure :
Quel Dieu nous imposa nos lois ?
La vague à la vague demande :
Quel est celui qui nous gourmande ?
La foudre dit à l'aquilon :
Sais-tu comment ton Dieu se nomme ?
Mais les astres, la terre et l'homme
Ne peuvent achever son nom.

Que tes temples, Seigneur, sont étroits pour mon âme !
Tombez, murs impuissants, tombez !

Laissez-moi voir ce ciel que vous me dérobez !
Architecte divin, ses dômes sont de flamme ?
Que tes temples, Seigneur, sont étroits pour mon âme !
Tombez, murs impuissants, tombez !

Voilà le temple où tu résides !
Sous la voûte du firmament
Tu ranimes ces feux rapides
Par leur éternel mouvement !
Tous ces enfants de la parole,
Balancés sur leur double pôle,
Nagent au sein de tes clartés
Et des cieux où leurs feux pâlissent
Sur notre globe ils réfléchissent
Des feux à toi-même empruntés !

L'Océan se joue
Aux pieds de son Roi ;
L'aquilon secoue
Ses ailes d'effroi ;
La foudre te loue
Et combat pour toi ;
L'éclair, la tempête,
Couronnent ta tête
D'un triple rayon ;
L'aurore t'admire,
Le jour te respire,
La nuit te soupire,
Et la terre expire
D'amour à ton nom !

Et moi, pour te louer, Dieu des soleils, que suis-je ?
Atome dans l'immensité,
Minute dans l'éternité,
Ombre qui passe et qui n'a plus été,
Peux-tu m'entendre sans prodige ?
Ah ! le prodige est ta bonté !
Je ne suis rien, Seigneur, mais ta soif me dévore ;
L'homme est néant, mon Dieu, mais ce néant t'adore,
Il s'élève par son amour ;

Tu ne peux mépriser l'insecte qui t'honore,
Tu ne peux repousser cette voix qui t'implore,
Et qui vers ton divin séjour,
Quand l'ombre s'évapore,
S'élève avec l'aurore,
Le soir gémit encore,
Renaît avec le jour.

Oui, dans ces champs d'azur que ta splendeur inonde,
Où ton tonnerre gronde,
Où tu veilles sur moi,
Ces accents, ces soupirs animés par la foi
Vont chercher, d'astre en astre, un Dieu qui me réponde,
Et d'échos en échos, comme des voix sur l'onde
Roulant de monde en monde
Retentir jusqu'à toi.

[*Harmonies poétiques.*

XV

Beauté, secret d'en haut, rayon, divin emblème,
Qui sait d'où tu descends ? qui sait pourquoi l'on t'aime,
Pourquoi l'œil te poursuit, pourquoi le cœur aimant
Se précipite à toi comme un fer à l'aimant,
D'une invincible étreinte à ton ombre s'attache,
S'embrase à ton approche et meurt quand on l'arrache ?
Soit que, comme un premier ou cinquième élément,
Répandue ici-bas et dans le firmament,
Sous des aspects divers ta force se dévoile,
Attire nos regards aux rayons de l'étoile,
Aux mouvements des mers, à la courbe des cieux,
Aux flexibles ruisseaux, aux arbres gracieux ;
Soit qu'en traits plus parlants sous nos yeux imprimée,
Et frappant de ton sceau la nature animée,
Tu donnes au lion l'effroi de ses regards,
Au cheval l'ondoiement de ses longs crins épars,
A l'aigle l'envergure et l'ombre de ses ailes,
Ou leurs enlacements au cou des tourterelles ;
Soit enfin qu'éclatant sur le visage humain,
Miroir de ta puissance, abrégé de ta main,

Dans les traits, les couleurs dont ta main le décore,
Au front d'homme ou de femme, où l'on te voit éclore,
Tu jettes ce rayon de grâce et de fierté
Que l'œil ne peut fixer sans en être humecté :
Nul ne sait ton secret, tout subit ton empire ;
Toute âme à ton aspect ou s'écrie ou soupire,
Et cet élan, qui suit ta fascination,
Semble de notre instinct la révélation.

Qui sait si tu n'es pas en effet quelque image
De Dieu même, qui perce à travers ce nuage ?
Ou si cette âme, à qui ce beau corps fut donné,
Sur son type divin ne l'a pas façonné ;
Sur la beauté suprême, ineffable, infinie,
N'en a pas modelé la charmante harmonie ;
Ne s'est pas en naissant, par des rapports secrets,
Approprié sa forme et composé ses traits,
Et dans cette splendeur que la forme révèle
Ne nous dit pas aussi : ' L'habitante est plus belle ' ?

Nous le saurons un jour, plus tard, plus haut. Pour moi,
Dieu seul m'en est témoin et lui seul sait pourquoi ;
Mais, soit que la beauté brille dans la nature,
Dans les cieux, dans une herbe, ou sur une figure,
Mon cœur, né pour l'amour et l'admiration,
Y vole de lui seul comme l'œil au rayon,
La couve d'un regard, s'y délecte et s'y pose,
Et toujours de soi-même y laisse quelque chose,
Et mon âme allumée y jette tour à tour
Une étincelle ou deux de son foyer d'amour.

Je me suis reproché souvent ces sympathies,
Trop soudaines en moi, trop vivement senties ;
Ces instincts du coup d'œil, ces premiers mouvements,
Qui d'une impression me font des sentiments.
Je me suis dit souvent : ' Dieu peut-être condamne
Ces penchants où du cœur la flamme se profane ;
Mais, hélas ! malgré nous l'œil se tourne au flambeau.
Est-ce un crime, ô mon Dieu, de trop aimer le beau ? '

[*Jocelyn* : Troisième époque.

ALFRED DE VIGNY

1797-1863

THE events of his life are soon told. Count Alfred de Vigny was born at Loches in Touraine; he came of a military family whose historical consequence he was disposed to overrate. At the first Restoration he received a commission in the Gendarmes Rouges, was transferred the next year to the Foot Guards, and served until 1828. His first handful of verses appeared just before the *Odes* of Hugo, with whom Vigny, as a member of Nodier's *cénacle*, was for some years on familiar terms. Later, Auguste Barbier was perhaps his only intimate friend; for his reserve was almost proverbial. *Eloa* dates from 1824; other poems were published in 1826, and a collective volume with three parts (*Livre Mystique*; *Livre Antique*; *Livre Moderne*) in 1837. The other works published in his lifetime were written in prose: the more important are the fine romantic drama *Chatterton* (1835) and the ripe, pensive studies of character called *Servitude et Grandeur militaires* (1835), the fruit of his experience as a soldier in time of peace. Vigny's other plays and the novels *Cinq-Mars* and *Stello*, are far inferior. He married an Englishwoman: it seems it was not a happy marriage. In 1846 he was elected to the Academy, and after the upheaval of 1848 he had—like other poets—a moment of political ambition and unsuccessfully sought election to the Assembly. He passed the rest of his days in almost complete retirement; and left the splendid poetry of his middle age—*Les Destinées*—as well as a curious diary, behind him in manuscript.

Notwithstanding the immediate success of *Eloa* and *Chatterton*, Vigny's rare and inexpansive genius was imperfectly recognised while he lived. Baudelaire alone excepted, he is the loneliest of the great French poets; and the dignity of his life, outwardly so tranquil, offers no temptation to found upon an unedifying legend a worship essentially unintelligent and insincere. His poetry is small in quantity: its subjectivity lies deep and is not tuned to elegy. He helped little to orchestrate the great romantic commonplaces. Keen and steady as was his gaze into the future of society, public zeal scarcely inspired him, nor the prestige of distant lands, nor

archaeology; and though much that he wrote is flawless and a careful reading of his earliest poems reveals a freer handling of the Alexandrine than might be expected from their date, it is not as an initiator of new rhythms that any part of his glory was won. Sharing with his fellows of the Romantic revival a new breadth and freedom in the choice of themes, a new sincerity of inspiration and responsiveness to the impressions of the visible world, a relative indifference to the psychological interest, he is distinguished from most of them by the classical virtues of sobriety and calm and by a strong consistency of thought. His original temperament, possibly reinforced by the accidents of life, gave to all he wrote the bias of a Lucretian despair, an unemphatic but by no means impassive scepticism; but it was a lucid reason that governed its expression in poems, mainly narrative, of which the interest centres upon a type or an emblem of transience or of fortitude, some vision of deep significance for the religion of honour and the sense of solitude, firmly perceived and strikingly presented.

His habit of seizing upon clear moral emblems and analogies for their help to an indirect self-revelation is not quite the symbolism of the Symbolists, some of whom have hailed Alfred de Vigny as an ancestor. But what may be called the constant mystical element in great poetry, the power to enhance the merely representative effects of words so that their passage leaves a track of dim implicit associations behind them, belongs to him in a very rare degree. And it may be that this gradual charm of his verses adds to their gravity of carriage and tends to insulate beauties that are hardly to be appreciated without pauses for reflexion. Movement at least is not a characteristic quality of Vigny's, though such a spirited story as that of *La Frégate 'la Sérieuse'* has rapidity enough. There is nothing clamorous or garish in his diction, no tumult of sensations, no confused opulence of imagery; but a thrifty exactitude by which he excelled at all periods, in *Moïse* or *Le Déluge* no less than in *La Colère de Samson* or *Le Mont des Oliviers*, in evoking wide unchequered prospects with a few firm strokes.

Eclipsed by his great contemporaries, Vigny had every right to assert his priority in some fresh fields of poetry which they made illustrious. He may have owed a little in the way of a suggestion to the author of *Cain* and *Manfred*, with whom he had no general affinity: but *Eloa* bears an evident relation to *La Chute d'un Ange*; with the very conception of the *poème*—the long lyrical narrative—

he set a thoughtful example; and it seems more than likely that the mere plan of his earlier work set Hugo upon the task of proving with *La Légende des Siècles* that the French have after all *la tête épique*. Nor is Leconte de Lisle without some obligations to the poet who embodied a consistent philosophy in plastic and strenuous forms. It is to the credit of a later generation that justice has been done at last to the disinterested and lovable austerity of Vigny, his intellectual flame, the strange and alluring resonance of his reluctant avowals.

The poetry of Alfred de Vigny is contained in a single volume (Calmann Lévy; Lemerre.)

XVI

Le Cor

i

J'aime le son du cor, le soir, au fond des bois,
Soit qu'il chante les pleurs de la biche aux abois,
Ou l'adieu du chasseur que l'écho faible accueille,
Et que le vent du nord porte de feuille en feuille.

Que de fois, seul, dans l'ombre à minuit demeuré,
J'ai souri de l'entendre, et plus souvent pleuré!
Car je croyais ouïr de ces bruits prophétiques
Qui précédaient la mort des paladins antiques.

O montagne d'azur! ô pays adoré!
Rocs de la Frazona, cirque du Marboré,
Cascades qui tombez des neiges entraînées
Sources, gaves, ruisseaux, torrents des Pyrénées.

Monts gelés et fleuris, trône des deux saisons,
Dont le front est de glace et le pied de gazons!
C'est là qu'il faut s'asseoir, c'est là qu'il faut entendre
Les airs lointains d'un cor mélancolique et tendre.

Souvent un voyageur, lorsque l'air est sans bruit,
De cette voix d'airain fait retentir la nuit;
A ses chants cadencés autour de lui se mêle
L'harmonieux grelot du jeune agneau qui bêle.

Une biche attentive, au lieu de se cacher,
Se suspend immobile au sommet du rocher,
Et la cascade unit, dans une chute immense,
Son éternelle plainte aux chants de la romance.

Ames des chevaliers, revenez-vous encor ?
Est-ce vous qui parlez avec la voix du cor ?
Roncevaux ! Roncevaux ! dans ta sombre vallée
L'ombre du grand Roland n'est donc pas consolée !

ii

Tous les preux étaient morts, mais aucun n'avait fui.
Il reste seul debout, Olivier près de lui :
L'Afrique sur le mont l'entoure et tremble encore.
'Roland, tu vas mourir, rends-toi,' criait le More ;

'Tous tes pairs sont couchés dans les eaux des torrents.'
Il rugit comme un tigre, et dit : 'Si je me rends,
Africain, ce sera lorsque les Pyrénées
Sur l'onde avec leurs corps rouleront entraînées.'

' — Rends-toi donc,' répond-il, 'ou meurs, car les voilà.'
Et du plus haut des monts un grand rocher roula.
Il bondit, il roula jusqu'au fond de l'abîme,
Et de ses pins, dans l'onde, il vint briser la cime.

'Merci,' cria Roland ; 'tu m'as fait un chemin.'
Et jusqu'au pied des monts le roulant d'une main,
Sur le roc affermi comme un géant s'élance,
Et, prête à fuir, l'armée à ce seul pas balance.

iii

Tranquilles cependant, Charlemagne et ses preux
Descendaient la montagne et se parlaient entre eux.
A l'horizon déjà, par leurs eaux signalées
De Luz et d'Argelès se montraient les vallées.

L'armée applaudissait. Le luth du troubadour
S'accordait pour chanter les saules de l'Adour;
Le vin français coulait dans la coupe étrangère;
Le soldat, en riant, parlait à la bergère.

Roland gardait les monts; tous passaient sans effroi.
Assis nonchalamment sur un noir palefroi
Qui marchait revêtu de housses violettes,
Turpin disait, tenant les saintes amulettes:

'Sire, on voit dans le ciel des nuages de feu;
Suspendez votre marche; il ne faut tenter Dieu.
Par monsieur Saint Denis, certes ce sont des âmes
Qui passent dans les airs sur ces vapeurs de flammes.

'Deux éclairs ont relui, puis deux autres encor.'
Ici l'on entendit le son lointain du cor.
L'empereur étonné, se jetant en arrière,
Suspend du destrier la marche aventurière.

'Entendez-vous?' dit-il.—'Oui, ce sont des pasteurs
Rappelant les troupeaux épars sur les hauteurs,'
Répondit l'archevêque, 'ou la voix étouffée
Du nain vert Obéron, qui parle avec sa fée.'

Et l'empereur poursuit; mais son front soucieux
Est plus sombre et plus noir que l'orage des cieux.
Il craint la trahison, et, tandis qu'il y songe
Le cor éclat et meurt, renaît et se prolonge.

'Malheur! c'est mon neveu! malheur! car, si Roland
Appelle à son secours, ce doit être en mourant.
Arrière, chevaliers, repassons la montagne!
Tremble encor sous nos pieds, sol trompeur de l'Espagne!'

iv

Sur le plus haut des monts s'arrêtent les chevaux;
L'écume les blanchit; sous leurs pieds, Roncevaux
Des feux mourants du jour à peine se colore—
A l'horizon lointain fuit l'étendard du More.

'Turpin, n'as-tu rien vu dans le fond du torrent?'
—'J'y vois deux chevaliers: l'un mort, l'autre expirant.
Tous deux sont écrasés sous une roche noire;
Le plus fort, dans sa main, élève un cor d'ivoire,
Son âme en s'exhalant nous appela deux fois.'

Dieu, que le son du cor est triste au fond des bois!

[*Poèmes*: le livre Moderne.

Écrit à Pau, en 1825.

XVII

La Maison du Berger

i

Si ton cœur, gémissant du poids de notre vie,
Se traîne et se débat comme un aigle blessé,
Portant comme le mien, sur son aile asservie,
Tout un monde fatal, écrasant et glacé;
S'il ne bat qu'en saignant par sa plaie immortelle,
S'il ne voit plus l'amour, son étoile fidèle,
Éclairer pour lui seul l'horizon effacé;

Si ton âme enchaînée, ainsi que l'est mon âme,
Lasse de son boulet et de son pain amer,
Sur sa galère en deuil laisse tomber la rame,
Penche sa tête pâle et pleure sur la mer,
Et, cherchant dans les flots une route inconnue,
Y voit, en frissonnant, sur son épaule nue,
La lettre sociale écrite avec le fer;

Si ton corps, frémissant des passions secrètes,
S'indigne des regards, timide et palpitant;
S'il cherche à sa beauté de profondes retraites
Pour la mieux dérober au profane insultant;
Si ta lèvre se sèche au poison des mensonges,
Si ton beau front rougit de passer dans les songes
D'un impur inconnu qui te voit et t'entend,

Pars courageusement, laisse toutes les villes ;
Ne ternis plus tes pieds aux poudres du chemin,
Du haut de nos pensers vois les cités serviles
Comme les rocs fatals de l'esclavage humain.
Les grands bois et les champs sont de vastes asiles,
Libres comme la mer autour des sombres îles.
Marche à travers les champs une fleur à la main.

La Nature t'attend dans un silence austère ;
L'herbe élève à tes pieds son nuage des soirs,
Et le soupir d'adieu du soleil à la terre
Balance les beaux lis comme des encensoirs.
La forêt a voilé ses colonnes profondes,
La montagne se cache, et sur les pâles ondes
Le saule a suspendu ses chastes reposoirs.

Le crépuscule ami s'endort dans la vallée,
Sur l'herbe d'émeraude et sur l'or du gazon,
Sous les timides joncs de la source isolée
Et sous le bois rêveur qui tremble à l'horizon,
Se balance en fuyant dans les grappes sauvages,
Jette son manteau gris sur le bord des rivages,
Et des fleurs de la nuit entr'ouvre la prison.

Il est sur ma montagne une épaisse bruyère
Où les pas du chasseur ont peine à se plonger,
Qui plus haut que nos fronts lève sa tête altière,
Et garde dans la nuit le pâtre et l'étranger.
Viens y cacher l'amour et ta divine faute ;
Si l'herbe est agitée ou n'est pas assez haute,
J'y roulerai pour toi la Maison du Berger.

Elle va doucement avec ses quatre roues,
Son toit n'est pas plus haut que ton front et tes yeux ;
La couleur du corail et celle de tes joues
Teignent le char nocturne et ses muets essieux.
Le seuil est parfumé, l'alcôve est large et sombre,
Et, là, parmi les fleurs, nous trouverons dans l'ombre,
Pour nos cheveux unis, un lit silencieux.

Je verrai, si tu veux, les pays de la neige,
Ceux où l'astre amoureux dévore et resplendit,
Ceux que heurtent les vents, ceux que la neige assiège,
Ceux où le pôle obscur sous sa glace est maudit.
Nous suivrons du hasard la course vagabonde.
Que m'importe le jour ? que m'importe le monde ?
Je dirai qu'ils sont beaux quand tes yeux l'auront dit.

Que Dieu guide à son but la vapeur foudroyante
Sur le fer des chemins qui traversent les monts,
Qu'un ange soit debout sur sa forge bruyante,
Quand elle va sous terre ou fait trembler les ponts
Et, de ses dents de feu, dévorant ses chaudières,
Transperce les ctiés et saute les rivières,
Plus vite que le cerf dans l'ardeur de ses bonds !

Oui, si l'ange aux yeux bleus ne veille sur sa route,
Et le glaive à la main ne plane et la défend,
S'il n'a compté les coups du levier, s'il n'écoute
Chaque tour de la roue en son cours triomphant,
S'il n'a l'œil sur les eaux et la main sur la braise,
Pour jeter en éclats la magique fournaise,
Il suffira toujours du caillou d'un enfant.

Sur le taureau de fer qui fume, souffle et beugle,
L'homme a monté trop tôt. Nul ne connaît encor
Quels orages en lui porte ce rude aveugle,
Et le gai voyageur lui livre son trésor ;
Son vieux père et ses fils, il les jette en otage
Dans le ventre brûlant du taureau de Carthage,
Qui les rejette en cendre aux pieds du dieu de l'or.

Mais il faut triompher du temps et de l'espace,
Arriver ou mourir. Les marchands sont jaloux.
L'or pleut sous les charbons de la vapeur qui passe,
Le moment et le but sont l'univers pour nous.
Tous se sont dit : 'Allons !' mais aucun n'est le maître
Du dragon mugissant qu'un savant a fait naître ;
Nous nous sommes joués à plus fort que nous tous.

Eh bien, que tout circule et que les grandes causes
Sur des ailes de feu lancent les actions,
Pourvu qu'ouverts toujours aux généreuses choses
Les chemins du vendeur servent les passions.
Béni soit le Commerce au hardi caducée,
Si l'Amour que tourmente une sombre pensée
Peut franchir en un jour deux grandes nations.

Mais, à moins qu'un ami menacé dans sa vie
Ne jette, en appelant, le cri du désespoir,
Ou qu'avec son clairon la France nous convie
Aux fêtes du combat, aux luttes du savoir ;
A moins qu'au lit de mort une mère éplorée
Ne veuille encor poser sur sa race adorée
Ces yeux tristes et doux qu'on ne doit plus revoir,

Évitons ces chemins.—Leur voyage est sans grâces,
Puisqu'il est aussi prompt, sur ses lignes de fer,
Que la flèche lancée à travers les espaces
Qui va de l'arc au but en faisant siffler l'air.
Ainsi jetée au loin, l'humaine créature
Ne respire et ne voit, dans toute la nature,
Qu'un brouillard étouffant que traverse un éclair.

On n'entendra jamais piaffer sur une route
Le pied vif du cheval sur les pavés en feu :
Adieu, voyages lents, bruits lointains qu'on écoute,
Le rire du passant, les retards de l'essieu,
Les détours imprévus des pentes variées,
Un ami rencontré, les heures oubliées,
L'espoir d'arriver tard dans un sauvage lieu.

La distance et le temps sont vaincus. La science
Trace autour de la terre un chemin triste et droit.
Le Monde est rétréci par notre expérience
Et l'équateur n'est plus qu'un anneau trop étroit.
Plus de hasard. Chacun glissera sur sa ligne
Immobile au seul rang que le départ assigne,
Plongé dans un calcul silencieux et froid.

Jamais la Rêverie amoureuse et paisible
N'y verra sans horreur son pied blanc attaché ;
Car il faut que ses yeux sur chaque objet visible
Versent un long regard, comme un fleuve épanché ;
Qu'elle interroge tout avec inquiétude,
Et, des secrets divins se faisant une étude,
Marche, s'arrête et marche avec le col penché.

[*Les Destinées.*

XVIII

La Mort du Loup

i

Les nuages couraient sur la lune enflammée
Comme sur l'incendie on voit fuir la fumée,
Et les bois étaient noirs jusques à l'horizon.
Nous marchions, sans parler, dans l'humide gazon,
Dans la bruyère épaisse et dans les hautes brandes,
Lorsque, sous des sapins pareils à ceux des Landes,
Nous avons aperçu les grands ongles marqués
Par les loups voyageurs que nous avions traqués.
Nous avons écouté, retenant notre haleine
Et le pas suspendu.—Ni le bois ni la plaine
Ne poussaient un soupir dans les airs ; seulement
La girouette en deuil criait au firmament ;
Car le vent, élevé, bien au-dessus des terres,
N'effleurait de ses pieds que les tours solitaires,
Et les chênes d'en bas, contre les rocs penchés,
Sur leurs coudes semblaient endormis et couchés.
Rien ne bruissait donc, lorsque, baissant la tête,
Le plus vieux des chasseurs qui s'étaient mis en quête
A regardé le sable en s'y couchant ; bientôt
Lui que jamais ici l'on ne vit en défaut,
A déclaré tout bas que ces marques récentes
Annonçaient la démarche et les griffes puissantes
De deux grands loups-cerviers et de deux louveteaux.
Nous avons tous alors préparé nos couteaux,

Et, cachant nos fusils et leurs lueurs trop blanches,
Nous allions pas à pas en écartant les branches.
Trois s'arrêtent, et moi, cherchant ce qu'ils voyaient,
J'aperçois tout à coup deux yeux qui flamboyaient,
Et je vois au delà quatre formes légères
Qui dansaient sous la lune au milieu des bruyères,
Comme font chaque jour, à grand bruit sous nos yeux,
Quand le maître revient, les lévriers joyeux.
Leur forme était semblable et semblable la danse;
Mais les enfants du Loup se jouaient en silence,
Sachant bien qu'à deux pas, ne dormant qu'à demi,
Se couche dans ses murs l'homme leur ennemi.
Le père était debout, et plus loin, contre un arbre,
Sa louve reposait comme celle de marbre
Qu'adoraient les Romains, et dont les flancs velus
Couvaient les demi-dieux Rémus et Romulus.
Le Loup vient et s'assied, les deux jambes dressées,
Par leurs ongles crochus dans le sable enfoncées.
Il est jugé perdu, puisqu'il était surpris,
Sa retraite coupée et tous ses chemins pris;
Alors il a saisi, dans sa gueule brûlante,
Du chien le plus hardi la gorge pantelante,
Et n'a pas desserré ses mâchoires de fer,
Malgré nos coups de feu qui traversaient sa chair,
Et nos couteaux aigus qui, comme des tenailles,
Se croisaient en plongeant dans ses larges entrailles,
Jusqu'au dernier moment où le chien étranglé,
Mort longtemps avant lui, sous ses pieds a roulé.
Le Loup le quitte alors et puis il nous regarde.
Les couteaux lui restaient au flanc jusqu'à la garde,
Le clouaient au gazon tout baigné dans son sang;
Nos fusils l'entouraient en sinistre croissant.
Il nous regarde encore, ensuite il se recouche,
Tout en léchant le sang répandu sur sa bouche,
Et, sans daigner savoir comment il a péri,
Refermant ses grands yeux, meurt sans jeter un cri.

ii

J'ai reposé mon front sur mon fusil sans poudre,
Me prenant à penser, et n'ai pu me résoudre
A poursuivre la Louve et ses fils, qui, tous trois,
Avaient voulu l'attendre, et, comme je le crois,
Sans ses deux louveteaux, la belle et sombre veuve
Ne l'eût pas laissé seul subir la grande épreuve;
Mais son devoir était de les sauver, afin
De pouvoir leur apprendre à bien souffrir la faim,
A ne jamais entrer dans le pacte des villes
Que l'homme a fait avec les animaux serviles,
Qui chassent devant lui, pour avoir le coucher,
Les premiers possesseurs du bois et du rocher.

iii

Hélas! ai-je pensé, malgré ce grand nom d'Hommes,
Que j'ai honte de nous, débiles que nous sommes!
Comment on doit quitter la vie et tous ses maux,
C'est vous qui le savez, sublimes animaux!
A voir ce que l'on fut sur terre et ce qu'on laisse,
Seul le silence est grand; tout le reste est faiblesse.
—Ah! je t'ai bien compris, sauvage voyageur,
Et ton dernier regard m'est allé jusqu'au cœur!
Il disait: 'Si tu peux, fais que mon âme arrive,
A force de rester studieuse et pensive,
Jusqu'à ce haut degré de stoïque fierté
Où, naissant dans les bois, j'ai tout d'abord monté.
Gémir, pleurer, prier, est également lâche.
Fais énergiquement ta longue et lourde tâche
Dans la voie où le sort a voulu t'appeler,
Puis, après, comme moi, souffre et meurs sans parler.'

[*Les Destinées.*

Écrit au château de M * * *.
1843.

VICTOR HUGO

1802-1885

Victor-Marie Hugo, of whose full and brilliant life only a meagre sketch will be expected here, was the third child of a soldier of fortune who served with distinction in the Revolutionary wars, in Italy, and in Spain—where he enjoyed the confidence of Joseph Bonaparte. The poet thought his family noble on his father's side : we only know that his grandfather was a joiner in Nancy, and that for two generations before the Hugos had been husbandmen in Lorraine. His mother, a Voltairian and a Royalist, was the daughter of a Nantes shipowner.

He was born at Besançon, and saw Elba and Corsica, Italy and Spain in his childhood : his only settled home was a house with a wild garden which had been part of the Feuillantine convent in the south of Paris. Victor and his brother Eugène had a desultory and broken, but comprehensive schooling. Their first master, in Paris, was an ex-Oratorian, but they learned more by devouring a circulating library ; for a little while they were at the Nobles' college in Madrid ; and after Napoleon's fall they were sent by General Hugo (who had separated from his wife) to a boarding-school in Paris, where they both made verses, and Victor tragedies. He took part, from the age of fifteen, in Academic competitions with some success ; printed in 1819 an ultra-Royalist satire on the telegraph ; founded in the same year, with his brother, a sort of literary supplement to the *Conservateur* of Chateaubriand—his idol in letters and politics at this stage ;—and a little volume of Odes and other poems, including effusions on the death of the Duke de Berri and the birth of the Duke de Bordeaux, appeared in 1822. A little later he was married (after a long and troubled courtship) to Adèle Foucher, the daughter of an old War Office friend of his family. Another periodical, *La Muse française*, was started by Hugo and other young men in 1823, and became the organ of new tendencies in literature, as Charles Nodier's rooms at the Arsenal Library were their first debating club.

The success of the first Odes was mainly political : for us their chief merit is their fluency. The Ballads which accompanied

additional odes published in 1826 are not only remarkable for command of rime and variety of measures but for the rather crude and puerile attempt to naturalise a poetry of popular magic latterly revived in the North of Europe, and (what is more interesting) to turn to account some forgotten native elements of an analogous character. *Cromwell* followed, Hugo's first, unplayed and unplayable drama, with its rash but most stimulating preface, which defined certain cardinal doctrines of the younger school (all subjects are in themselves legitimate; it is better to be complete than to be perfect; character is the paramount element of beauty; contrary moods may be associated in one work), and made it impossible for the rising poet to maintain the attitude of ostensible neutrality in the quarrel between Classics and Romantics which he had begun by affecting.

From this point his poetical career falls into three periods. In the first, eclipsing Vigny and rivalling Lamartine by the loud and sometimes scandalous triumph of his dramas, his fiction and his lyrics, he captained the fight for artistic freedom and did more than any other Frenchman to effect a necessary revolution in the poetical vocabulary and in poetical forms; and under him Sainte-Beuve and Gautier, the two Deschamps and Barbier and Brizeux, Soulary and the mutinous young recruit Alfred de Musset carried the Romantic banner to victory.—It opens in 1829 with *Les Orientales*, pictures of a fabulous East ingenuously but intensely imagined, sincerely conventional and revealing a palette of extraordinary opulence, as well as an experimental suppleness with rhythms wherein the coming transformation of the Alexandrine was implicit already. Four successive volumes of lyrical poetry marked the stages in his progress from virtuosity to genuine self-expression. The familiar tone prevails in *Les Feuilles d'Automne*; *Les Chants du Crépuscule* and *Les Voix Intérieures* contain several of his stately national odes, as well as some poems which record a growing preoccupation with the ideas of God, immortality, progress, and a few discreet tributes to her who inspired the most durable and absorbing of his irregular affections. These elements, with much self-doubt, resentment at hostile criticism, changes and waverings in religious and political belief, are all to be found in *Les Rayons et les Ombres* and in that considerable portion of the posthumous collection *Toute la Lyre* which belongs to these fruitful years. In prose, his two imaginative pamphlets directed against the death penalty appeared in 1829, and a year later *Notre-Dame de Paris*, a masterpiece for which two juvenile adventures in

fiction had not prepared his public: it remains the supreme type of the purely romantic novel in France, more memorable as a piece of splendid prose and for its vivid emblematical portraiture of fifteenth century Paris than for interest of character or coherence of plot. But it was his dramas that brought him most celebrity: *Marion Delorme* (suppressed for a little by the thin-skinned government of Charles x.), *Hernani*, whose name has now the legendary glory of a battle and a victory in art, the stirring tragi-comedy *Ruy Blas*,—and *Lucrèce Borgia* and *Angelo* in prose. Unflagging beauty of style alone lifts these dramas out of the class of historical melodrama to which undoubtedly their prototype—the *Henri III.* of Dumas—belongs. Constructive skill, passages of real pathetic force, an incomparable vigour balance, perhaps, the psychological poverty, the irrelevant tirades, the false emphasis and perverse situations which are their manifest weakness.—During this period, Victor Hugo's rather superficial Catholicism degenerated into a vague inexacting theism; and he lost his attachment for the elder Bourbons. The July Monarchy gave him a seat in the House of Peers and he had much personal intercourse with Louis-Philippe, though, early in the reign, the poet was already a theoretical Republican.

A second period, the most glorious, may be dated between 1843 and 1870. In the spring of the former year, *Les Burgraves*, a drama full of epical intention, was produced and fell immediately before the efforts of a clique. Hugo renounced the stage, and he was consoling himself by travel in the Pyrenees when, in May, the news reached him that his daughter Léopoldine, recently married to a brother of the poet Auguste Vacquerie, had been drowned with her husband while boating on the Seine. This was the greatest sorrow of his life, and its effect upon his poetry was as profound as that of Arthur Hallam's death upon the genius of Tennyson. Hugo's *In Memoriam* is contained in *Les Contemplations*—the very finest assuredly of his lyrical works—of which the first part was already written at this time, but which saw the light many years later. Between 1843 and 1853 he published nothing but a book of travel and a pamphlet, and it was civic indignation, not personal bereavement, that caused him to break silence with *Les Châtiments*. Towards the end of Louis-Philippe's reign he began to play a considerable part in politics, tending more and more towards the extreme Left. Under the Republic he was returned to the Legislative Assembly: his old worship of Napoleon and the Prince-President's

well-known interest in utopian theories made the Élysée, for a little while, attractive to him. The 'crime of December' was a rude awakening. Hugo was one of those who resisted its consequences to the last, and his own part in this crisis, though doubtless not so conspicuous as he fancied, was certainly creditable to his patriotism and his personal courage. When the last barricade had been stormed and a price was put upon his head, Hugo escaped to Brussels, where many other notable recalcitrants assembled, and soon after crossed the Channel, a proscript. First Jersey and then Guernsey was the home of his exile, which lasted (for he refused to benefit by an amnesty) until the fall of the Empire. Here, having shaken off the mere trappings of Romance, he rose above all schools and produced, one after another, his least contestable masterpieces. *Les Châtiments* revived the grand manner of ancient lyrical satire; in *Les Contemplations*, he blends reminiscence with fantasy, and the consummate expression of grief and resignation with visions of terror and beatitude; the first series of *La Légende des Siècles* attains the highest reach of French verse and suffices to affirm the capacity of the modern French for heroical poetry; and in the marvellously skilful *Chansons des Rues et des Bois* he seems a giant at play. Besides these he wrote in the same period much at least of the poetry published after his death, and, in particular, most or all of the two pendants, as we have them, to the *Légende*—the fragmentary *Fin de Satan*, and *Dieu*, the imaginative confession of successive creeds. In exile, too, he finished and produced the humane, enthralling, absurd and unique prose epic of our times, *Les Misérables*; and he wrote *Les Travailleurs de la Mer* and *L'Homme qui rit*, and the swollen preface to his son's translation of Shakespeare, which teems with enthusiasm and error, critical perversities, flashes of insight and splendid irrelevance.

At the news of Sedan and the 'days of September,' Victor Hugo returned to Paris. He stood the siege, contributed to the national defence the proceeds of his *Histoire d'un Crime*, and was elected to the Assembly which sat at Bordeaux. He voted against the peace and resigned his seat, and after the Commune, which he disapproved and excused, did his best to mitigate the horrors of retaliation.

He had overrated his political authority: indeed the next few years he passed in comparative neglect. But his fame had long been universal: the heart of Paris warmed towards the master of all who wrote in the French tongue, the irreducible foe of tyranny, who had suffered and endured;—his old age knew the solace of popular esteem,

and his life ended in apotheosis. Factions and sects made use of his name and of his pen, and much of his last writing is diminished for us by the vein of peevish and verbose and almost puerile invective which he indulged, and by an increasing tendency to facile improvisation. But his mastery of rhythm and language never grew less, and among the works produced in this final period of his long career are several volumes which may almost rank with his best achievement. *L'Année Terrible*, his memorable tribute to the War and the Commune, was followed by a book of poetry consecrated to his tenderness for the children of his dead son Charles. A second and a third series of *La Légende des Siècles* are full of magnificent pages, though upon the whole inferior to the first. All the great sources of his inspiration enrich *Les Quatre Vents de l'Esprit*, and especially the heroical. A last drama, *Torquemada*, and a last historical novel, the admirable *Quatre-vingt-treize*, must be added to the list.

Victor Hugo died in May 1885 at the age of eighty-three; he was mourned by a whole nation. Sixteen volumes in prose and verse—memoirs, correspondence, *juvenilia*, criticism, and much splendid poetry—have been filled by the writing he left behind him. Not even *Toute la Lyre* could add to his glory. A last book of verse appeared in time for the impressive celebration of his centenary.

The most fragmentary judgment upon Victor Hugo must at least endeavour to present him not only as the prince of French poets in his time but as one of the very greatest of all poets;—and it is well to forget for a little that he was, incidentally, so much besides. In a certain sense his writings, outside poetry, and even the notable acts by which he asserted his personality in real life, being uniformly governed by the same necessities of his imagination, may be called redundant—not because with unequal success he essayed every form of composition and took several parts as a public man, but because with a genius too stupendously synthetic and too exclusively creative to be truly versatile, he added nothing durable to his greatness by apparently respecting the modern categories into which the organisation of knowledge has carved out the ancient kingdom of poetry. 'Il a su transmuer la substance de tout en substance poétique,' said Leconte de Lisle. But Hugo did not always resist the temptation to show himself in attitudes which challenge approval upon alien grounds; so that it has often seemed reasonable and almost relevant to reproach this supreme lyrist with not being a systematic 'thinker' or a fully instructed and impartial chronicler or an incontrovertible apologist:

for, especially in the poetry of his old age, the frequent assumption of a didactic or rather a polemical tone makes us forget that fortunate inaptness for abstractions which should have secured him against all criticism that is not poetical criticism. Yet upon the whole an instinct surer than the sense of his limitations served him even in what may be called without disrespect his aberrations, and made every theme yield its utmost value to that faculty of words and that faculty of vision which are the promontories of Hugo's incomparable genius.

He contains (he is perhaps the only modern writer who contains) the whole of a living language. Encyclopædic in his range, his power of assimilation, Hugo is supreme among the canonised writers of the world in his absolute command over the resources of his tongue, which he rejuvenated and reconciled with its past. He is the greatest rhetorician who ever lived, unapproached in the art of amplifying, in the sense of climax, and also a master of composition. When he chose, he could be measured and graceful; he is always verbally perspicuous and logical. That presence of mind or instinct of verbal association which is perhaps the ultimate secret of fecundity was at once his strength and his weakness. Words had a mysterious power over him: he is sometimes visibly the bondsman of irresistible suggestions in sound, and the prestige of certain syllables often betrayed him into digressive apostrophes and irrelevant illustration.

Of verse he is the absolute sovereign, the indefatigable forger of rhythms, the magical equilibrist, the constantly fortunate manipulator of rime. What he did for French verse has been indicated elsewhere in this volume: it is enough to repeat that he made it obedient to all the motions of the mind, and that he reinforced the pleasures of habit and concord with those which variance and surprise can give to the ear. In the gift of structure and inventiveness he is only matched by Ronsard.

In the breadth, clearness and tenacity of his vision (his other senses were less keen) lies the secret of his imaginative audacity. He gave wings to qualities, a human heart to the inanimate, and expressed no idea without metaphor. Other poets have described myths, interpreted and retold them; Hugo is a mythologist, whose art repeats and illustrates the obscure anthropomorphous processes we impute to the collective mind of primitive peoples.

His creations are all emblems, and governed by overwhelming impressions of contrast. He handles individual men with as great a

vivifying power as natural forces, but in general without that respect for proportion, that complete sympathy and that taste for diversity which are conditions of psychological truth. His special kingdom is not made of the love of men and women; and he is sparing of confession—the characteristic resource of moderns. He is the poet of pity, still more the poet of terror earthly and spectral; the poet of childhood and the sea; a masterly painter of war, havoc and confusion.

All tones are his, but especially a tone of inexorable majesty and solemnity. Hugo has little humour, but much wit—of a curious, original sort. Emphasis is his constant enemy: it was occasionally Shakespeare's. For the rest, he is not a philosopher, but he interests philosophers. No poet in his century, or any century of our era, threw more ideas into circulation by giving them a sensuous shape and a voice to enchant and to haunt the memory of men.

A fine edition of Victor Hugo's works, produced by the Imprimerie Nationale, is not yet complete. The *édition définitive* contains all that was published in his lifetime: it exists in two sizes: the text is not free from occasional blunders. The following is a list of his works in verse:

LYRICAL.

Odes, 1822.
Odes et Ballades, 1826.
Les Orientales, 1829.
Les Feuilles d'Automne, 1831.
Les Chants du Crépuscule, 1835.
Les Voix Intérieures, 1837.
Les Rayons et les Ombres, 1841.
Les Châtiments, 1853.
Les Contemplations, i. ii. 1856.
La Légende des Siècles, i. 1859.
Chansons des Rues et des Bois, 1864.
L'Année Terrible, 1873.
L'Art d'être Grand-père, 1877.
La Légende des Siècles, ii. 1877.
Le Pape.
La Pitié Suprême.
L'Ane.
Les quatre Vents de l'Esprit, 1881.
La Légende des Siècles, iii. 1883.

Posthumous.

La Fin de Satan.
Dieu.
Toute la Lyre, i. ii. iii.
Dernière Gerbe, 1902.

DRAMA.

Cromwell, 1827.
Marion Delorme, 1829 (1831).
Hernani, 1830.
Le Roi s'amuse, 1832.
Ruy Blas, 1838.
Les Burgraves, 1843.
Torquemada.

Posthumous.

Théâtre en Liberté.
Amy Robsart.
Les Jumeaux.

XIX

MAZEPPA

i

Ainsi, quand Mazeppa, qui rugit et qui pleure,
A vu ses bras, ses pieds, ses flancs qu'un sabre effleure,
Tous ses membres liés
Sur un fougueux cheval, nourri d'herbes marines,
Qui fume, et fait jaillir le feu de ses narines
Et le feu de ses pieds;

Quand il s'est dans ses nœuds roulé comme un reptile,
Qu'il a bien réjoui de sa rage inutile
Ses bourreaux tout joyeux,
Et qu'il retombe enfin sur la croupe farouche,
La sueur sur le front, l'écume dans la bouche
Et du sang dans les yeux;

Un cri part, et soudain voilà que par la plaine
Et l'homme et le cheval, emportés, hors d'haleine,
Sur les sables mouvants,
Seuls, emplissant de bruit un tourbillon de poudre
Pareil au noir nuage où serpente la foudre,
Volent avec les vents!

Ils vont. Dans les vallons comme un orage ils passent,
Comme ces ouragans qui dans les monts s'entassent,
Comme un globe de feu;
Puis déjà ne sont plus qu'un point noir dans la brume,
Puis s'effacent dans l'air comme un flocon d'écume
Au vaste océan bleu.

Ils vont. L'espace est grand. Dans le désert immense,
Dans l'horizon sans fin qui toujours recommence,
Ils se plongent tous deux.
Leur course comme un vol les emporte, et grands chênes,
Villes et tours, monts noirs liés en longues chaînes,
Tout chancelle autour d'eux.

Et, si l'infortuné, dont la tête se brise,
Se débat, le cheval, qui devance la brise,
D'un bond plus effrayé
S'enfonce au désert vaste, aride, infranchissable,
Qui devant eux s'étend, avec ses plis de sable,
Comme un manteau rayé.

Tout vacille et se peint de couleurs inconnues :
Il voit courir les bois, courir les larges nues,
Le vieux donjon détruit,
Les monts dont un rayon baigne les intervalles ;
Il voit ; et les troupeaux de fumantes cavales
Le suivent à grand bruit !

Et le ciel, où déjà les pas du soir s'allongent,
Avec ses océans de nuages où plongent
Des nuages encor,
Et son soleil qui fend leurs vagues de sa proue,
Sur son front ébloui tourne comme une roue
De marbre aux veines d'or !

Son œil s'égare et luit, sa chevelure traîne,
Sa tête pend ; son sang rougit la jaune arène,
Les buissons épineux ;
Sur ses membres gonflés la corde se replie,
Et comme un long serpent resserre et multiplie
Sa morsure et ses nœuds.

Le cheval, qui ne sent ni le mors ni la selle,
Toujours fuit, et toujours son sang coule et ruisselle,
Sa chair tombe en lambeaux ;
Hélas ! voici déjà qu'aux cavales ardentes
Qui le suivaient, dressant leurs crinières pendantes,
Succèdent les corbeaux !

Les corbeaux, le grand duc à l'œil rond, qui s'effraie,
L'aigle effaré des champs de bataille, et l'orfraie,
Monstre au jour inconnu,
Les obliques hiboux, et le grand vautour fauve,
Qui fouille au flanc des morts, où son cou rouge et chauve
Plonge comme un bras nu !

Tous viennent élargir la funèbre volée ;
Tous quittent pour le suivre et l'yeuse isolée
Et les nids du manoir.
Lui, sanglant, éperdu, sourd à leurs cris de joie,
Demande en les voyant : Qui donc là-bas déploie
Ce grand éventail noir ?

La nuit descend lugubre, et sans robe étoilée.
L'essaim s'acharne, et suit, tel qu'une meute ailée,
Le voyageur fumant.
Entre le ciel et lui, comme un tourbillon sombre,
Il les voit, puis les perd, et les entend dans l'ombre
Voler confusément.

Enfin, après trois jours d'une course insensée,
Après avoir franchi fleuves à l'eau glacée,
Steppes, forêts, déserts,
Le cheval tombe aux cris de mille oiseaux de proie,
Et son ongle de fer sur la pierre qu'il broie
Éteint ses quatre éclairs.

Voilà l'infortuné, gisant, nu, misérable,
Tout tacheté de sang, plus rouge que l'érable
Dans la saison des fleurs.
Le nuage d'oiseaux sur lui tourne et s'arrête ;
Maint bec ardent aspire à ronger dans sa tête
Ses yeux brûlés de pleurs.

Et bien ! ce condamné qui hurle et qui se traîne,
Ce cadavre vivant, les tribus de l'Ukraine
Le feront prince un jour.
Un jour, semant les champs de morts sans sépultures,
Il dédommagera par de larges pâtures
L'orfraie et le vautour.

Sa sauvage grandeur naîtra de son supplice.
Un jour, des vieux hetmans il ceindra la pelisse,
Grand à l'œil ébloui ;
Et, quand il passera, ces peuples de la tente,
Prosternés, enverront la fanfare éclatante
Bondir autour de lui !

ii

Ainsi, lorsqu'un mortel, sur qui son dieu s'étale,
S'est vu lier vivant sur ta croupe fatale,
Génie, ardent coursier,
En vain il lutte, hélas ! tu bondis, tu l'emportes
Hors du monde réel, dont tu brises les portes
Avec tes pieds d'acier !

Tu franchis avec lui déserts, cimes chenues
Des vieux monts, et les mers, et par-delà les nues,
De sombres régions ;
Et mille impurs esprits que ta course réveille,
Autour du voyageur, insolente merveille,
Pressent leurs légions !

Il traverse d'un vol, sur tes ailes de flamme,
Tous les champs du possible, et les mondes de l'âme,
Boit au fleuve éternel ;
Dans la nuit orageuse ou la nuit étoilée
Sa chevelure, aux crins des comètes mêlée,
Flamboie au front du ciel.

Les six lunes d'Herschel, l'anneau du vieux Saturne,
Le pôle, arrondissant une aurore nocturne
Sur son front boréal,
Il voit tout : et pour lui ton vol, que rien ne lasse,
De ce monde sans borne à chaque instant déplace
L'horizon idéal.

Qui peut savoir, hormis les démons et les anges,
Ce qu'il souffre à te suivre, et quels éclairs étranges
A ses yeux reluiront,
Comme il sera brûlé d'ardentes étincelles,
Hélas ! et dans la nuit combien de froides ailes
Viendront battre son front ?

Il crie épouvanté, tu poursuis implacable.
Pâle, épuisé, béant, sous ton vol qui l'accable
Il ploie avec effroi;
Chaque pas que tu fais semble creuser sa tombe.
Enfin le terme arrive . . . il court, il vole, il tombe,
Et se relève roi!

[*Les Orientales.*

Mai 1828.

XX

Parfois, lorsque tout dort, je m'assieds plein de joie
Sous le dôme étoilé qui sur nos fronts flamboie;
J'écoute si d'en haut il tombe quelque bruit;
Et l'heure vainement me frappe de son aile
Quand je contemple, ému, cette fête éternelle
Que le ciel rayonnant donne au monde la nuit!

Souvent alors j'ai cru que ces soleils de flamme
Dans ce monde endormi n'échauffaient que mon âme;
Qu'à les comprendre seul j'étais prédestiné;
Que j'étais, moi, vaine ombre obscure et taciturne,
Le roi mystérieux de la pompe nocturne;
Que le ciel pour moi seul s'était illuminé!

[*Les Feuilles d'Automne.*

XXI

GUITARE

Gastibelza, l'homme à la carabine,
Chantait ainsi:
'Quelqu'un a-t-il connu doña Sabine?
Quelqu'un d'ici?
Dansez, chantez, villageois! la nuit gagne
Le mont Falù.[1]—
Le vent qui vient à travers la montagne
Me rendra fou!

[1] Le *mont Falù*. Prononcer *mont Falou*.

'Quelqu'un de vous a-t-il connu Sabine,
Ma señora?
Sa mère était la vieille maugrabine
D'Antequera,
Qui chaque nuit criait dans la Tour-Magne
Comme un hibou . . .—
Le vent qui vient à travers la montagne
Me rendra fou.

'Dansez, chantez! Des biens que l'heure envoie
Il faut user.
Elle était jeune et son œil plein de joie
Faisait penser.—
A ce vieillard qu'un enfant accompagne
Jetez un sou! . . .—
Le vent qui vient à travers la montagne
Me rendra fou.

'Vraiment, la reine eût près d'elle été laide
Quand, vers le soir,
Elle passait sur le pont de Tolède
En corset noir.
Un chapelet du temps de Charlemagne
Ornait son cou . . .—
Le vent qui vient à travers la montagne
Me rendra fou.

'Le roi disait, en la voyant si belle,
A son neveu:
—Pour un baiser, pour un sourire d'elle,
Pour un cheveu,
Infant don Ruy, je donnerais l'Espagne
Et le Pérou!—
Le vent qui vient à travers la montagne
Me rendra fou.

'Je ne sais pas si j'aimais cette dame,
Mais je sais bien
Que, pour avoir un regard de son âme,
Moi, pauvre chien,

J'aurais gaîment passé dix ans au bagne
Sous le verrou . . .—
Le vent qui vient à travers la montagne
Me rendra fou.

'Un jour d'été que tout était lumière,
Vie et douceur,
Elle s'en vint jouer dans la rivière
Avec sa sœur.
Je vis le pied de sa jeune compagne
Et son genou . . .—
Le vent qui vient à travers la montagne
Me rendra fou.

'Quand je voyais cette enfant, moi le pâtre
De ce canton,
Je croyais voir la belle Cléopâtre,
Qui, nous dit-on,
Menait César, empereur d'Allemagne,
Par le licou . . .—
Le vent qui vient à travers la montagne
Me rendra fou.

'Dansez, chantez, villageois, la nuit tombe.
Sabine, un jour,
A tout vendu, sa beauté de colombe,
Et son amour,
Pour l'anneau d'or du comte de Saldagne,
Pour un bijou . . .—
Le vent qui vient à travers la montagne
Me rendra fou.

'Sur ce vieux banc souffrez que je m'appuie,
Car je suis las.
Avec ce comte elle s'est donc enfuie!
Enfuie, hélas!
Par le chemin qui va vers la Cerdagne,
Je ne sais où . . .—
Le vent qui vient à travers la montagne
Me rendra fou.

'Je la voyais passer de ma demeure,
Et c'était tout.
Mais à présent je m'ennuie à toute heure,
Plein de dégoût,
Rêveur oisif, l'âme dans la campagne,
La dague au clou . . .—
Le vent qui vient à travers la montagne
M'a rendu fou!'

[*Les Rayons et les Ombres.*

14 *mars* 1837.

XXII

LA COCCINELLE

Elle me dit: Quelque chose
Me tourmente. Et j'aperçus
Son cou de neige, et, dessus,
Un petit insecte rose.

J'aurais dû, — mais, sage ou fou,
A seize ans on est farouche, —
Voir le baiser sur sa bouche
Plus que l'insecte à son cou.

On eût dit un coquillage;
Dos rose et taché de noir.
Les fauvettes pour nous voir
Se penchaient dans le feuillage.

Sa bouche fraîche était là;
Je me courbai sur la belle,
Et je pris la coccinelle;
Mais le baiser s'envola.

— Fils, apprends comme on me nomme,
Dit l'insecte du ciel bleu:
Les bêtes sont au bon Dieu,
Mais la bêtise est à l'homme.

[*Les Contemplations*, i.

Paris, *mai* 1830.

XXIII

Le Rouet d'Omphale

Il est dans l'atrium, le beau rouet d'ivoire.
La roue agile est blanche, et la quenouille est noire;
La quenouille est d'ébène incrusté de lapis.
Il est dans l'atrium sur un riche tapis.

Un ouvrier d'Égine a sculpté sur la plinthe
Europe, dont un dieu n'écoute pas la plainte.
Le taureau blanc l'emporte. Europe, sans espoir,
Crie, et, baissant les yeux, s'épouvante de voir
L'océan monstrueux qui baise ses pieds roses.

Des aiguilles, du fil, des boîtes demi-closes,
Les laines de Milet, peintes de pourpre et d'or,
Emplissent un panier près du rouet qui dort.

Cependant, odieux, effroyables, énormes,
Dans le fond du palais, vingt fantômes difformes,
Vingt monstres tout sanglants, qu'on ne voit qu'à demi,
Errent en foule autour du rouet endormi;
Le lion néméen, l'hydre affreuse de Lerne,
Cacus, le noir brigand de la noire caverne,
Le triple Géryon, et les typhons des eaux
Qui le soir à grand bruit soufflent dans les roseaux.
De la massue au front tous ont l'empreinte horrible,
Et tous, sans approcher, rôdant d'un air terrible,
Sur le rouet, où pend un fil souple et lié,
Fixent de loin dans l'ombre un œil humilié.

[*Les Contemplations*, i.

XXIV

Soir

Dans les ravins la route oblique
Fuit. — Il voit luire au-dessus d'eux
Le ciel sinistre et métallique
A travers des arbres hideux.

Des êtres rôdent sur les rives;
Le nénuphar nocturne éclôt;
Des agitations furtives
Courbent l'herbe, rident le flot.

Les larges estompes de l'ombre,
Mêlant les lueurs et les eaux,
Ébauchent dans la plaine sombre
L'aspect monstrueux du chaos.

Voici que les spectres se dressent.
D'où sortent-ils ? que veulent-ils ?
Dieu ! de toutes parts apparaissent
Toutes sortes d'affreux profils !

Il marche. Les heures sont lentes.
Il voit là-haut, tout en marchant,
S'allumer ces pourpres sanglantes,
Splendeurs lugubres du couchant.

Au loin une cloche, une enclume,
Jettent dans l'air leurs faibles coups.
A ses pieds flotte dans la brume
Le paysage immense et doux.

Tout s'éteint. L'horizon recule.
Il regarde en ce lointain noir
Se former dans le crépuscule
Les vagues figures du soir.

La plaine, qu'une brise effleure,
Ajoute, ouverte au vent des nuits,
A la solennité de l'heure
L'apaisement de tous les bruits.

A peine, ténébreux murmures,
Entend-on, dans l'espace mort,
Les palpitations obscures
De ce qui veille quand il dort.

Les broussailles, les grès, les ormes,
Le vieux saule, le pan de mur,
Deviennent les contours difformes
De je ne sais quel monde obscur.

L'insecte aux nocturnes élîtres
Imite le cri des sabbats.
Les étangs sont comme les vitres
Par où l'on voit le ciel d'en bas.

Par degrés, monts, forêts, cieux, terre,
Tout prend l'aspect terrible et grand
D'un monde entrant dans un mystère,
D'un navire dans l'ombre entrant.

[*Toute la Lyre*, i.

XXV

TROIS ANS APRÈS

Il est temps que je me repose;
Je suis terrassé par le sort.
Ne me parlez pas d'autre chose
Que des ténèbres où l'on dort!

Que veut-on que je recommence?
Je ne demande désormais
A la création immense
Qu'un peu de silence et de paix!

Pourquoi m'appelez-vous encore?
J'ai fait ma tâche et mon devoir.
Qui travaillait avant l'aurore
Peut s'en aller avant le soir.

A vingt ans, deuil et solitude!
Mes yeux, baissés vers le gazon,
Perdirent la douce habitude
De voir ma mère à la maison.

Elle nous quitta pour la tombe ;
Et vous savez bien qu'aujourd'hui
Je cherche, en cette nuit qui tombe,
Un autre ange qui s'est enfui !

Vous savez que je désespère,
Que ma force en vain se défend,
Et que je souffre comme père,
Moi qui souffris tant comme enfant !

Mon œuvre n'est pas terminée,
Dites-vous. Comme Adam banni,
Je regarde ma destinée
Et je vois bien que j'ai fini.

L'humble enfant que Dieu m'a ravie
Rien qu'en m'aimant savait m'aider.
C'était le bonheur de ma vie
De voir ses yeux me regarder.

Si ce Dieu n'a pas voulu clore
L'œuvre qu'il me fit commencer,
S'il veut que je travaille encore,
Il n'avait qu'à me la laisser !

Il n'avait qu'à me laisser vivre
Avec ma fille à mes côtés,
Dans cette extase où je m'enivre
De mystérieuses clartés !

Ces clartés, jour d'une autre sphère,
O Dieu jaloux, tu nous les vends !
Pourquoi m'as-tu pris la lumière
Que j'avais parmi les vivants ?

As-tu donc pensé, fatal maître,
Qu'à force de te contempler,
Je ne voyais plus ce doux être,
Et qu'il pouvait bien s'en aller ?

T'es-tu dit que l'homme, vaine ombre,
Hélas, perd son humanité
A trop voir cette splendeur sombre
Qu'on appelle la vérité ?

Qu'on peut le frapper sans qu'il souffre,
Que son cœur est mort dans l'ennui,
Et qu'à force de voir le gouffre,
Il n'a plus qu'un abîme à lui ?

Qu'il va, stoïque, où tu l'envoies,
Et que désormais, endurci,
N'ayant plus ici-bas de joies,
Il n'a plus de douleurs aussi ?

As-tu pensé qu'une âme tendre
S'ouvre à toi pour se mieux fermer,
Et que ceux qui veulent comprendre
Finissent par ne plus aimer ?

O Dieu ! vraiment, as-tu pu croire
Que je préférais, sous les cieux,
L'effrayant rayon de ta gloire
Aux douces lueurs de ses yeux ?

Si j'avais su tes lois moroses,
Et qu'au même esprit enchanté
Tu ne donnes point ces deux choses,
Le bonheur et la vérité,

Plutôt que de lever tes voiles,
Et de chercher, cœur triste et pur,
A te voir au fond des étoiles,
O Dieu sombre d'un monde obscur,

J'eusse aimé mieux, loin de ta face,
Suivre, heureux, un étroit chemin,
Et n'être qu'un homme qui passe
Tenant son enfant par la main !

Maintenant, je veux qu'on me laisse !
J'ai fini ! le sort est vainqueur.
Que vient-on rallumer sans cesse
Dans l'ombre qui m'emplit le cœur ?

Vous qui me parlez, vous me dites
Qu'il faut, rappelant ma raison,
Guider les foules décrépites
Vers les lueurs de l'horizon ;

Qu'à l'heure où les peuples se lèvent,
Tout penseur suit un but profond ;
Qu'il se doit à tous ceux qui rêvent,
Qu'il se doit à tous ceux qui vont ;

Qu'une âme, qu'un feu pur anime,
Doit hâter, avec sa clarté,
L'épanouissement sublime
De la future humanité ;

Qu'il faut prendre part, cœurs fidèles,
Sans redouter les océans,
Aux fêtes des choses nouvelles,
Aux combats des esprits géants !

Vous voyez des pleurs sur ma joue,
Et vous m'abordez mécontents,
Comme par le bras on secoue
Un homme qui dort trop longtemps.

Mais songez à ce que vous faites
Hélas ! cet ange au front si beau,
Quand vous m'appelez à vos fêtes,
Peut-être a froid dans son tombeau.

Peut-être, livide et pâlie,
Dit-elle dans son lit étroit :
— Est-ce que mon père m'oublie
Et n'est plus là, que j'ai si froid ?

Quoi ! lorsqu'à peine je résiste
Aux choses dont je me souviens,
Quand je suis brisé, las et triste,
Quand je l'entends qui me dit : Viens !

Quoi ! vous voulez que je souhaite,
Moi, plié par un coup soudain,
La rumeur qui suit le poëte,
Le bruit que fait le paladin !

Vous voulez que j'aspire encore
Aux triomphes doux et dorés !
Que j'annonce aux dormeurs l'aurore !
Que je crie : Allez ! espérez !

Vous voulez que, dans la mêlée,
Je rentre ardent parmi les forts,
Les yeux à la voûte étoilée... —
Oh ! l'herbe épaisse où sont les morts !

[*Les Contemplations*, ii.

10 *novembre* 1846.

XXVI

O gouffre ! l'âme plonge et rapporte le doute.
Nous entendons sur nous les heures, goutte à goutte,
Tomber comme l'eau sur les plombs ;
L'homme est brumeux, le monde est noir, le ciel est sombre,
Les formes de la nuit vont et viennent dans l'ombre ;
Et nous, pâles, nous contemplons.

Nous contemplons l'obscur, l'inconnu, l'invisible.
Nous sondons le réel, l'idéal, le possible,
L'être, spectre toujours présent.
Nous regardons trembler l'ombre indéterminée.
Nous sommes accoudés sur notre déstinée,
L'œil fixe et l'esprit frémissant.

Nous épions des bruits dans ces vides funèbres,
Nous écoutons le souffle, errant dans les ténèbres,
Dont frissonne l'obscurité ;
Et, par moments, perdus dans les nuits insondables,
Nous voyons s'éclairer de lueurs formidables
La vitre de l'éternité.

[*Les Contemplations*, ii.

Marine Terrace, *septembre* 1853.

XXVII

France, à l'heure où tu te prosternes,
Le pied d'un tyran sur le front,
La voix sortira des cavernes,
Les enchaînés tressailleront.

Le banni, debout sur la grève,
Contemplant l'étoile et le flot,
Comme ceux qu'on entend en rêve,
Parlera dans l'ombre tout haut ;

Et ses paroles qui menacent,
Ses paroles dont l'éclair luit,
Seront comme des mains qui passent
Tenant des glaives dans la nuit.

Elles feront frémir les marbres
Et les monts que brunit le soir ;
Et les chevelures des arbres
Frissonneront sous le ciel noir.

Elles seront l'airain qui sonne,
Le cri qui chasse les corbeaux,
Le souffle inconnu dont frissonne
Le brin d'herbe sur les tombeaux ;

Sur les races qui se transforment,
Sombre orage, elles planeront ;
Et si ceux qui vivent s'endorment,
Ceux qui sont morts s'éveilleront.

[*Les Châtiments.*

Jersey, *août* 1853.

XXVIII

i

Oh! je sais qu'ils feront des mensonges sans nombre
Pour s'évader des mains de la vérité sombre;
Qu'ils nieront, qu'ils diront: ce n'est pas moi, c'est lui!
Mais, n'est-il pas vrai, Dante, Eschyle, et vous, prophètes?
Jamais, du poignet des poëtes,
Jamais, pris au collet, les malfaiteurs n'ont fui.
J'ai fermé sur ceux-ci mon livre expiatoire;
J'ai mis des verrous à l'histoire;
L'histoire est un bagne aujourd'hui.

Le poëte n'est plus l'esprit qui rêve et prie;
Il a la grosse clef de la conciergerie.
Quand ils entrent au greffe, où pend leur chaîne au clou,
On regarde le prince aux poches, comme un drôle,
Et les empereurs à l'épaule;
Macbeth est un escroc, César est un filou.
Vous gardez des forçats, ô mes strophes ailées!
Les Calliopes étoilées
Tiennent des registres d'écrou.

ii

O peuples douloureux, il faut bien qu'on vous venge!
Les rhéteurs froids m'ont dit: Le poëte, c'est l'ange;
Il plane, ignorant Fould, Magnan, Morny, Maupas;
Il contemple la nuit sereine avec délices . . .—
Non, tant que vous serez complices
De ces crimes hideux que je suis pas à pas,
Tant que vous couvrirez ces brigands de vos voiles,
Cieux azurés, soleils, étoiles,
Je ne vous regarderai pas!

Tant qu'un gueux forcera les bouches à se taire,
Tant que la liberté sera couchée à terre
Comme une femme morte et qu'on vient de noyer,
Tant que dans les pontons on entendra des râles,
J'aurai des clartés sépulcrales

Pour tous ces fronts abjects qu'un bandit fait ployer.
Je crierai : Lève-toi, peuple ! ciel, tonne et gronde !
La France, dans sa nuit profonde,
Verra ma torche flamboyer !

iii

Ces coquins vils qui font de la France une Chine,
On entendra mon fouet claquer sur leur échine.
Ils chantent : *Te Deum*, je crierai : *Memento !*
Je fouaillerai les gens, les faits, les noms, les titres,
Porte-sabres et porte-mitres ;
Je les tiens dans mon vers comme dans un étau.
On verra choir surplis, épaulettes, bréviaires,
Et César, sous mes étrivières,
Se sauver, troussant son manteau !

Et les champs, et les prés, le lac, la fleur, la plaine,
Les nuages pareils à des flocons de laine,
L'eau qui fait frissonner l'algue et les goëmons,
Et l'énorme océan, hydre aux écailles vertes,
Les forêts de rumeurs couvertes,
Le phare sur les flots, l'étoile sur les monts,
Me reconnaîtront bien et diront à voix basse :
C'est un esprit vengeur qui passe,
Chassant devant lui des démons !

[*Les Châtiments.*

Jersey, *novembre* 1852.

XXIX

LE CHASSEUR NOIR

— Qu'es-tu, passant ? Le bois est sombre,
Les corbeaux volent en grand nombre,
Il va pleuvoir.
— Je suis celui qui va dans l'ombre,
Le chasseur noir !

Les feuilles des bois, du vent remuées,
Sifflent . . . on dirait
Qu'un sabbat nocturne emplit de huées
Toute la forêt;
Dans une clairière au sein des nuées
La lune apparaît.

Chasse le daim, chasse la biche,
Cours dans les bois, cours dans la friche,
Voici le soir.
Chasse le czar, chasse l'Autriche,
O chasseur noir!

Les feuilles des bois—
Il tonne, il pleut, c'est le déluge.
Le renard fuit, pas de refuge
Et pas d'espoir!
Chasse l'espion, chasse le juge,
O chasseur noir!

Les feuilles des bois—
Tous les démons de Saint Antoine
Bondissent dans la folle avoine
Sans t'émouvoir;
Chasse l'abbé, chasse le moine,
O chasseur noir!

Les feuilles des bois—
Chasse les ours! ta meute jappe.
Que pas un sanglier n'échappe!
Fais ton devoir!
Chasse César, chasse le pape,
O chasseur noir!

Les feuilles des bois—
Le loup de ton sentier s'écarte.
Que ta meute à sa suite parte!
Cours! fais-le choir!
Chasse le brigand Bonaparte,
O chasseur noir!

Les feuilles des bois, du vent remuées,
Tombent . . . on dirait
Que le sabbat sombre aux rauques huées
A fui la forêt ;
Le clair chant du coq perce les nuées ;
Ciel ! l'aube apparaît !

Tout reprend sa force première.
Tu redeviens la France altière,
Si belle à voir,
L'ange blanc vêtu de lumière,
O chasseur noir !

Les feuilles des bois, du vent remuées,
Tombent . . . on dirait
Que le sabbat sombre aux rauques huées
A fui la forêt ;
Le clair chant du coq perce les nuées ;
Ciel ! l'aube apparaît !

[*Les Châtiments.*

Jersey, *septembre* 1853.

XXX

Gros Temps la Nuit

Le vent hurle, la rafale
Sort, ruisselante cavale,
Du gouffre obscur
Et, hennissant sur l'eau bleue
Des crins épars de sa queue
Fouette l'azur.

L'horizon, que l'onde encombre,
Serpent, au bas du ciel sombre
Court tortueux ;
Toute la mer est difforme ;
L'eau s'emplit d'un bruit énorme
Et monstrueux.

Le flot vient, s'enfuit, s'approche,
Et bondit comme la cloche
Dans le clocher,
Puis tombe, et bondit encore;
La vague immense et sonore
Bat le rocher.

L'océan frappe la terre.
Oh! le forgeron mystère,
Au noir manteau,
Que forge-t-il dans la brume,
Pour battre une telle enclume
D'un tel marteau?

L'hydre écaillée à l'œil glauque
Se roule sur le flot rauque
Sans frein ni mors;
La tempête maniaque
Remue au fond du cloaque
Les os des morts.

La mer chante un chant barbare.
Les marins sont à la barre,
Tout ruisselants;
L'éclair sur les promontoires
Éblouit les vagues noires
De ses yeux blancs.

Les marins qui sont au large
Jettent tout ce qui les charge,
Canons, ballots;
Mais le flot gronde et blasphème.
— Ce que je veux, c'est vous-même,
O matelots!

Le ciel et la mer font rage.
C'est la saison, c'est l'orage,
C'est le climat.
L'ombre aveugle le pilote.
La voile en haillons grelotte
Au bout du mât.

Tout se plaint, l'ancre à la proue,
La vergue au câble, la roue
Au cabestan.
On croit voir, dans l'eau qui gronde,
Comme un mont roulant sur l'onde,
Léviathan.

Tout prend un hideux langage ;
Le roulis parle au tangage,
La hune au foc.
L'un dit :—L'eau sombre se lève.
L'autre dit :—Le hameau rêve
Au chant du coq.

C'est un vent de l'autre monde
Qui tourmente l'eau profonde
De tout côté,
Et qui rugit dans l'averse ;
L'éternité bouleverse
L'immensité.

C'est fini ! la cale est pleine.
Adieu, maison, verte plaine,
Atre empourpré !
L'homme crie : ô providence !
La mort aux dents blanches danse
Sur le beaupré.

Et dans la sombre mêlée
Quelque fée échevelée,
Urgel, Morgan,
A travers le vent qui souffle,
Jette en riant sa pantoufle
A l'ouragan.

[*Toute la Lyre*, i.

2 *février* 1854.

XXXI

La Terre: Hymne

Elle est la terre, elle est la plaine, elle est le champ.
Elle est chère à tous ceux qui sèment en marchant;
Elle offre un lit de mousse au pâtre;
Frileuse, elle se chauffe au soleil éternel,
Rit, et fait cercle avec les planètes du ciel
Comme des sœurs autour de l'âtre.

Elle aime le rayon propice aux blés mouvants,
Et l'assainissement formidable des vents,
Et les souffles, qui sont des lyres,
Et l'éclair, front vivant qui, lorsqu'il brille et fuit,
Tout ensemble épouvante et rassure la nuit
A force d'effrayants sourires.

Gloire à la terre! Gloire à l'aube où Dieu paraît!
Au fourmillement d'yeux ouverts dans la forêt,
Aux fleurs, aux nids que le jour dore!
Gloire au blanchissement nocturne des sommets!
Gloire au ciel bleu qui peut, sans s'épuiser jamais,
Faire des dépenses d'aurore!

La terre aime ce ciel tranquille, égal pour tous,
Dont la sérénité ne dépend pas de nous,
Et qui mêle à nos vils désastres,
A nos deuils, aux éclats de rires effrontés,
A nos méchancetés, à nos rapidités,
La douceur profonde des astres.

La terre est calme auprès de l'océan grondeur;
La terre est belle; elle a la divine pudeur
De se cacher sous les feuillages;
Le printemps son amant vient en mai la baiser;
Elle envoie au tonnerre altier pour l'apaiser
La fumée humble des villages.

Ne frappe pas, tonnerre. Ils sont petits, ceux-ci.
La terre est bonne ; elle est grave et sévère aussi ;
Les roses sont pures comme elle ;
Quiconque pense, espère et travaille lui plaît,
Et l'innocence offerte à tout homme est son lait,
Et la justice est sa mamelle.

La terre cache l'or et montre les moissons ;
Elle met dans le flanc des fuyantes saisons
Le germe des saisons prochaines,
Dans l'azur les oiseaux qui chuchotent : aimons !
Et les sources au fond de l'ombre, et sur les monts
L'immense tremblement des chênes.

L'harmonie est son œuvre auguste sous les cieux ;
Elle ordonne aux roseaux de saluer, joyeux
Et satisfaits, l'arbre superbe ;
Car l'équilibre, c'est le bas aimant le haut ;
Pour que le cèdre altier soit dans son droit, il faut
Le consentement du brin d'herbe.

Elle égalise tout dans la fosse, et confond
Avec les bouviers morts la poussière que font
Les Césars et les Alexandres ;
Elle envoie au ciel l'âme et garde l'animal ;
Elle ignore, en son vaste effacement du mal,
La différence de deux cendres.

Elle paie à chacun sa dette, au jour la nuit,
A la nuit le jour, l'herbe aux rocs, aux fleurs le fruit ;
Elle nourrit ce qu'elle crée,
Et l'arbre est confiant quand l'homme est incertain ;
O confrontation qui fait honte au destin,
O grande nature sacrée !

Elle fut le berceau d'Adam et de Japhet,
Et puis elle est leur tombe ; et c'est elle qui fait
Dans Tyr qu'aujourd'hui l'on ignore,
Dans Sparte et Rome en deuil, dans Memphis abattu,
Dans tous les lieux où l'homme a parlé, puis s'est tu,
Chanter la cigale sonore.

Pourquoi ? Pour consoler les sépulcres dormants.
Pourquoi ? Parce qu'il faut faire aux écroulements
Succéder les apothéoses,
Aux voix qui disent Non les voix qui disent Oui,
Aux disparitions de l'homme évanoui
Le chant mystérieux des choses.

La terre a pour amis les moissonneurs ; le soir,
Elle voudrait chasser du vaste horizon noir
L'âpre essaim des corbeaux voraces,
A l'heure où le bœuf las dit : Rentrons maintenant ;
Quand les bruns laboureurs s'en reviennent traînant
Les socs pareils à des cuirasses.

Elle enfante sans fin les fleurs qui durent peu ;
Les fleurs ne font jamais de reproches à Dieu ;
Des chastes lys, des vignes mûres,
Des myrtes frissonnant au vent, jamais un cri
Ne monte vers le ciel vénérable, attendri
Par l'innocence des murmures.

Elle ouvre un livre obscur sous les rameaux épais ;
Elle fait son possible, et prodigue la paix
Au rocher, à l'arbre, à la plante,
Pour nous éclairer, nous, fils de Cham et d'Hermès,
Qui sommes condamnés à ne lire jamais
Qu'à de la lumière tremblante.

Son but, c'est la naissance et ce n'est pas la mort ;
C'est la bouche qui parle et non la dent qui mord ;
Quand la guerre infâme se rue
Creusant dans l'homme un vil sillon de sang baigné,
Farouche, elle détourne un regard indigné
De cette sinistre charrue.

Meurtrie, elle demande aux hommes : A quoi sert
Le ravage ? Quel fruit produira le désert ?
Pourquoi tuer la plaine verte ?
Elle ne trouve pas utiles les méchants,
Et pleure la beauté virginale des champs
Déshonorés en pure perte.

La terre fut jadis Cérès, Alma Cérès,
Mère aux yeux bleus des blés, des prés et des forêts ;
Et je l'entends qui dit encore :
Fils, je suis Démèter, la déesse des dieux ;
Et vous me bâtirez un temple radieux
Sur la colline Callichore.

[*La Légende des Siècles.*

XXXII

Booz Endormi

Booz s'était couché de fatigue accablé ;
Il avait tout le jour travaillé dans son aire,
Puis avait fait son lit à sa place ordinaire ;
Booz dormait auprès des boisseaux pleins de blé.

Ce vieillard possédait des champs de blés et d'orge ;
Il était, quoique riche, à la justice enclin ;
Il n'avait pas de fange en l'eau de son moulin,
Il n'avait pas d'enfer dans le feu de sa forge.

Sa barbe était d'argent comme un ruisseau d'avril.
Sa gerbe n'était point avare ni haineuse ;
Quand il voyait passer quelque pauvre glaneuse :
— Laissez tomber exprès des épis, disait-il.

Cet homme marchait pur loin des sentiers obliques,
Vêtu de probité candide et de lin blanc ;
Et, toujours du côte des pauvres ruisselant,
Ses sacs de grains semblaient des fontaines publiques.

Booz était bon maître et fidèle parent ;
Il était généreux, quoiqu'il fût économe ;
Les femmes regardaient Booz plus qu'un jeune homme,
Car le jeune homme est beau, mais le vieillard est grand.

Le vieillard, qui revient vers la source première,
Entre aux jours éternels et sort des jours changeants ;
Et l'on voit de la flamme aux yeux des jeunes gens,
Mais dans l'œil du vieillard on voit de la lumière.

. . . . . .

Donc, Booz dans la nuit dormait parmi les siens;
Près des meules, qu'on eût prises pour des décombres,
Les moissonneurs couchés faisaient des groupes sombres;
Et ceci se passait dans des temps très anciens.

Les tribus d'Israël avaient pour chef un juge;
La terre, où l'homme errait sous la tente, inquiet
Des empreintes de pieds de géants qu'il voyait,
Était encor mouillée et molle du déluge.

. . . . . .

Comme dormait Jacob, comme dormait Judith,
Booz, les yeux fermés, gisait sous la feuillée;
Or, la porte du ciel s'étant entre-bâillée
Au-dessus de sa tête, un songe en descendit.

Et ce songe était tel, que Booz vit un chêne
Qui, sorti de son ventre, allait jusqu'au ciel bleu;
Une race y montait comme une longue chaîne;
Un roi chantait en bas, en haut mourait un dieu.

Et Booz murmurait avec la voix de l'âme:
'Comment se pourrait-il que de moi ceci vînt?
Le chiffre de mes ans a passé quatrevingt,
Et je n'ai pas de fils, et je n'ai plus de femme.

'Voilà longtemps que celle avec qui j'ai dormi,
O Seigneur! a quitté ma couche pour la vôtre,
Et nous sommes encor tout mêlés l'un à l'autre,
Elle à demi vivante et moi mort à demi.

'Une race naîtrait de moi! Comment le croire?
Comment se pourrait-il que j'eusse des enfants?
Quand on est jeune, on a des matins triomphants,
Le jour sort de la nuit comme d'une victoire;

'Mais, vieux, on tremble ainsi qu'à l'hiver le bouleau;
Je suis veuf, je suis seul, et sur moi le soir tombe,
Et je courbe, ô mon Dieu! mon âme vers la tombe,
Comme un bœuf ayant soif penche son front vers l'eau.'

Ainsi parlait Booz dans le rêve et l'extase,
Tournant vers Dieu ses yeux par le sommeil noyés ;
Le cèdre ne sent pas une rose à sa base,
Et lui ne sentait pas une femme à ses pieds.

. . . . . .

Pendant qu'il sommeillait, Ruth, une moabite,
S'était couchée aux pieds de Booz, le sein nu,
Espérant on ne sait quel rayon inconnu,
Quand viendrait du réveil la lumière subite.

Booz ne savait point qu'une femme était là,
Et Ruth ne savait point ce que Dieu voulait d'elle.
Un frais parfum sortait des touffes d'asphodèle ;
Les souffles de la nuit flottaient sur Galgala.

L'ombre était nuptiale, auguste et solennelle ;
Les anges y volaient sans doute obscurément,
Car on voyait passer dans la nuit, par moment,
Quelque chose de bleu qui paraissait une aile.

La respiration de Booz qui dormait
Se mêlait au bruit sourd des ruisseaux sur la mousse.
On était dans le mois où la nature est douce,
Les collines ayant des lys sur leur sommet.

Ruth songeait et Booz dormait ; l'herbe était noire ;
Les grelots des troupeaux palpitaient vaguement ;
Une immense bonté tombait du firmament ;
C'était l'heure tranquille où les lions vont boire.

Tout reposait dans Ur et dans Jérimadeth ;
Les astres émaillaient le ciel profond et sombre ;
Le croissant fin et clair parmi ces fleurs de l'ombre
Brillait à l'occident, et Ruth se demandait,

Immobile, ouvrant l'œil à moitié sous ses voiles,
Quel dieu, quel moissonneur de l'éternel été
Avait, en s'en allant, négligemment jeté
Cette faucille d'or dans le champ des étoiles.

[*La Légende des Siècles.*

XXXIII

CASSANDRE

Argos. La cour du palais.

CASSANDRE, *sur un char.* CLYTEMNESTRE. LE CHŒUR.

LE CHŒUR. Elle est fille de roi.—Mais sa ville est en cendre.
Elle a droit à ce char et n'en veut pas descendre.
Depuis qu'on l'a saisie, elle n'a point parlé.
Le marbre de Syrta, la neige de Thulé
N'ont pas plus de froideur que cette âpre captive.
Elle est à l'avenir formidable attentive.
Elle est pleine d'un dieu redoutable et muet;
Le sinistre Apollon d'Ombos, qui remuait
Dodone avec le souffle et Thèbe avec la lyre,
Mêle une clarté sombre à son morne délire.
Elle a la vision des choses qui seront;
Un reflet de vengeance est déjà sur son front;
Elle est princesse, elle est pythie, elle est prêtresse,
Elle est esclave. Étrange et lugubre détresse!
Elle vient sur un char, étant fille de roi.
Le peuple, qui regarde aller, pâles d'effroi,
Les prisonniers pieds nus qu'on chasse à coups de lance,
Et qui rit de leurs cris, a peur de son silence.
(*Le char s'arrête.*)
CLYTE. Femme, à pied! Tu n'es pas ici dans ton pays.
LE CHŒUR. Allons, descends du char, c'est la reine, obéis.
CLYTE. Crois-tu que j'ai le temps de t'attendre à la porte?
Hâte-toi. Car bientôt il faut que le roi sorte.
Peut-être entends-tu mal notre langue d'ici?
Si ce que je te dis ne se dit pas ainsi
Au pays dont tu viens et dont tu te sépares,
Parle en signes alors, fais comme les barbares.
LE CHŒUR. Si l'on parlait sa langue, on saurait son secret.
On sent en la voyant ce qu'on éprouverait
Si l'on venait de prendre une bête farouche.

CLYTE. Je ne lui parle plus. L'horreur ferme sa bouche.
Triste, elle songe à Troie, au ciel jadis serein.
Elle ne prendra pas l'habitude du frein
Sans le couvrir longtemps d'une sanglante écume.
(*Clytemnestre sort.*)
LE CHŒUR. Cède au destin. Crois-moi. Je suis sans amertume.
Descends du char. Reçois la chaîne à ton talon.
CASSANDRE. Dieux ! Grands dieux ! Terre et ciel ! Apollon ! Apollon !
APOLLON LOXIAS (*dans l'ombre*). Je suis là. Tu vivras, afin que ton œil voie
Le flamboiement d'Argos plein des cendres de Troie.

[*La Légende des Siècles.*

XXXIV

LA CHANSON DE JOSS

'Si tu veux, faisons un rêve.
Montons sur deux palefrois;
Tu m'emmènes, je t'enlève.
L'oiseau chante dans les bois.

'Je suis ton maître et ta proie;
Partons, c'est la fin du jour;
Mon cheval sera la joie,
Ton cheval sera l'amour.

'Nous ferons toucher leurs têtes;
Les voyages sont aisés.
Nous donnerons à ces bêtes
Une avoine de baisers.

'Viens ! nos doux chevaux mensonges
Frappent du pied tous les deux,
Le mien au fond de mes songes,
Et le tien au fond des cieux.

'Un bagage est nécessaire;
Nous emporterons nos vœux,
Nos bonheurs, notre misère,
Et la fleur de tes cheveux.

'Viens, le soir brunit les chênes,
Le moineau rit; ce moqueur
Entend le doux bruit des chaînes
Que tu m'as mises au cœur.

'Ce ne sera point ma faute
Si les forêts et les monts,
En nous voyant côte à côte,
Ne murmurent pas: Aimons!

'Viens, sois tendre, je suis ivre.
O les verts taillis mouillés!
Ton souffle te fera suivre
Des papillons réveillés.

'L'envieux oiseau nocturne,
Triste, ouvrira son œil rond;
Les nymphes, penchant leur urne,
Dans les grottes souriront,

'Et diront: "Sommes-nous folles!
"C'est Léandre avec Héro;
"En écoutant leurs paroles
"Nous laissons tomber notre eau."

'Allons-nous-en par l'Autriche.
Nous aurons l'aube à nos fronts;
Je serai grand, et toi riche,
Puisque nous nous aimerons.

'Allons-nous-en par la terre,
Sur nos deux chevaux charmants,
Dans l'azur, dans le mystère,
Dans les éblouissements!

'Nous entrerons à l'auberge,
Et nous paîrons l'hôtelier
De ton sourire de vierge,
De mon bonjour d'écolier.

'Tu seras dame, et moi comte ;
Viens, mon cœur s'épanouit,
Viens, nous conterons ce conte
Aux étoiles de la nuit.'

[*La Légende des Siècles* : Éviradnus.

XXXV

ÉCRIT EN EXIL

L'heureux n'est pas le vrai, le droit n'est pas le nombre ;
Un vaincu toujours triste, un vainqueur toujours sombre,
Le sort n'a-t-il donc pas d'autre oscillation ?
Toujours la même roue et le même Ixion !
Qui que vous soyez, Dieu vers qui tout nous ramène,
Si le faible souffrait en vain, si l'âme humaine
N'était qu'un grain de cendre aux ouragans jeté,
Je serais mécontent de votre immensité ;
Il faut, dans l'univers fatal, et pourtant libre,
Aux âmes l'équité comme aux cieux l'équilibre ;
J'ai besoin de sentir de la justice au fond
Du gouffre où l'ombre avec la clarté se confond ;
J'ai besoin du méchant mal à l'aise, et du crime
Retombant sur le monstre et non sur la victime ;
Un Caïn triomphant importune mes yeux ;
J'ai besoin, quand le mal est puissant et joyeux,
D'un certain grondement là-haut, et de l'entrée
Du tonnerre au-dessus de la tête d'Atrée.

[*La Légende des Siècles.*

XXXVI

LA CHANSON DE FANTINE

Nous achèterons de bien belles choses
En nous promenant le long des faubourgs.
Les bleuets sont bleus, les roses sont roses,
Les bleuets sont bleus, j'aime mes amours.

La vierge Marie auprès de mon poêle
Est venue hier en manteau brodé,
Et m'a dit:—Voici, caché sous mon voile,
Le petit qu'un jour tu m'as demandé.—
Courez à la ville, ayez de la toile,
Achetez un fil, achetez un dé.

Nous achèterons de bien belles choses
En nous promenant le long des faubourgs.

Bonne sainte Vierge, auprès de mon poêle
J'ai mis un berceau de rubans orné;
Dieu me donnerait sa plus belle étoile,
J'aime mieux l'enfant que tu m'as donné.
—Madame, que faire avec cette toile?
—Faites un trousseau pour mon nouveau-né.

Les bleuets sont bleus, les roses sont roses,
Les bleuets sont bleus, j'aime mes amours.

Lavez cette toile.—Où?—Dans la rivière.
Faites-en, sans rien gâter ni salir,
Une belle jupe avec sa brassière,
Que je veux broder et de fleurs emplir.
—L'enfant n'est plus là, madame, qu'en faire?
—Faites-en un drap pour m'ensevelir.

Nous achèterons de bien belles choses
En nous promenant le long des faubourgs.
Les bleuets sont bleus, les roses sont roses,
Les bleuets sont bleus, j'aime mes amours.

[*Les Misérables*: Fantine.

XXXVII

A La Belle Impérieuse

L'amour, panique
De la raison,
Se communique
Par le frisson.

Laissez-moi dire,
N'accordez rien.
Si je soupire,
Chantez, c'est bien.

Si je demeure
Triste, à vos pieds,
Et si je pleure,
C'est bien, riez.

Un homme semble
Souvent trompeur.
Mais si je tremble,
Belle, ayez peur.

[*Chansons des Rues et des Bois.*

XXXVIII

1ER JANVIER

Enfants, on vous dira plus tard que le grand-père
Vous adorait; qu'il fit de son mieux sur la terre,
Qu'il eut fort peu de joie et beaucoup d'envieux,
Qu'au temps où vous étiez petits il était vieux,
Qu'il n'avait pas de mots bourrus ni d'airs moroses,
Et qu'il vous a quittés dans la saison des roses;
Qu'il est mort, que c'était un bonhomme clément;
Que dans l'hiver fameux du grand bombardement
Il traversait Paris tragique et plein d'épées
Pour vous porter des tas de jouets, des poupées,
Et des pantins faisant mille gestes bouffons;
Et vous serez pensifs sous les arbres profonds.

[*L'Année Terrible.*

XXXIX

CHOSES DU SOIR

Le brouillard est froid, la bruyère est grise;
Les troupeaux de bœufs vont aux abreuvoirs;
La lune, sortant des nuages noirs
Semble une clarté qui vient par surprise.

Je ne sais plus quand, je ne sais plus où,
Maître Yvon soufflait dans son biniou.

Le voyageur marche et la lande est brune;
Une ombre est derrière, une ombre est devant;
Blancheur au couchant, lueur au levant;
Ici crépuscule, et là clair de lune.

Je ne sais plus quand, je ne sais plus où,
Maître Yvon soufflait dans son biniou.

La sorcière assise allonge sa lippe;
L'araignée accroche au toit son filet;
Le lutin reluit dans le feu follet
Comme un pistil d'or dans une tulipe.

Je ne sais plus quand, je ne sais plus où,
Maître Yvon soufflait dans son biniou.

On voit sur la mer des chasse-marées;
Le naufrage guette un mât frissonnant;
Le vent dit: demain! l'eau dit: maintenant!
Les voix qu'on entend sont désespérées.

Je ne sais plus quand, je ne sais plus où,
Maître Yvon soufflait dans son biniou.

Le coche qui va d'Avranche à Fougère
Fait claquer son fouet comme un vif éclair;
Voici le moment où flottent dans l'air
Tous ces bruits confus que l'ombre exagère.

Je ne sais plus quand, je ne sais plus où,
Maître Yvon soufflait dans son biniou.

Dans les bois profonds brillent les flambées;
Un vieux cimetière est sur un sommet;
Où Dieu trouve-t-il tout ce noir qu'il met
Dans les cœurs brisés et les nuits tombées?

Je ne sais plus quand, je ne sais plus où,
Maître Yvon soufflait dans son biniou.

Des flaques d'argent tremblent sur les sables ;
L'orfraie est au bord des talus crayeux ;
Le pâtre, à travers le vent, suit des yeux
Le vol monstrueux et vague des diables.

Je ne sais plus quand, je ne sais plus où,
Maître Yvon soufflait dans son biniou.

Un panache gris sort des cheminées ;
Le bûcheron passe avec son fardeau ;
On entend, parmi le bruit des cours d'eau,
Des frémissements de branches traînées.

Je ne sais plus quand, je ne sais plus où,
Maître Yvon soufflait dans son biniou.

La faim fait rêver les grands loups moroses ;
La rivière court, le nuage fuit ;
Derrière la vitre où la lampe luit,
Les petits enfants ont des têtes roses.

Je ne sais plus quand, je ne sais plus où,
Maître Yvon soufflait dans son biniou.

[*L'Art d'être Grand-père.*

XL

CHANSON D'AUTREFOIS

Jamais elle ne raille,
Étant un calme esprit ;
Mais toujours elle rit.—
Voici des brins de mousse avec des brins de paille ;
Fauvette des roseaux,
Fais ton nid sur les eaux.

Quand sur la clarté douce
Qui sort de tes beaux yeux,
On passe, on est joyeux.—
Voici des brins de paille avec des brins de mousse ;
Martinet de l'azur,
Fais ton nid dans mon mur.

Dans l'aube avril se mire,
Et les rameaux fleuris
Sont pleins de petits cris.—
Voici de ton regard, voici de ton sourire;
Amour, ô doux vainqueur,
Fais ton nid dans mon cœur.

[*Les Quatre Vents de l'Esprit*, iii.

GÉRARD DE NERVAL

1808-1855

Gérard Labrunie, who adopted the name de Nerval, was the son of an army surgeon : it was one of his delusions that his father was Napoleon. He was born in Paris and brought up by an uncle at Ermenonville : a desultory education ended at the Lycée Charlemagne. Before he left school young Gérard was an author, having published, under the title of *Napoléon, ou la France guerrière*, some worthless patriotic rhapsodies, followed shortly by a bundle of political satires which are not much more estimable. His serious work began with a translation of *Faust* (1828) which Goethe admired, and some lyrical fragments of which were used by Berlioz for his great work. A book of versions from German poets appeared two years later.

About this time a hopeless passion for an actress, Jenny Colon, drove him abroad. He wandered for some years in Italy, Germany, and the Levant ; and this obscure period of a driftless life, if not immediately fertile, seems to contain the secret of his most fortunate inspiration. In 1841 he became insane, and it is doubtful whether he ever recovered perfectly, though his most productive period dates from that year. He wrote much for the press, collaborating with his schoolfellow Gautier in dramatic criticism, and reproducing scenes of Oriental life. *Les Illuminés*, a volume of curious studies on Cagliostro and other famous occultists, was published in 1852, and in 1854 appeared his finest prose work, *Les Filles du Feu*. Early in the year 1855, Gérard's body was found hanging to an iron grating in a vile alley near the Châtelet. It is not quite certain whether he killed himself.

Aurélia—the story of his madness—and *La Bohême Galante* were published after his death : so was his finest poetry. As a poet he had given little to the world in his maturity ; and though the inner public had always appreciated his subtle and vivacious prose, he did not live to enjoy the fame of those enthralling and rhapsodical romances *Les Filles du Feu*, the most delightful of which is *Sylvie*, a masterpiece at once fantastical and idyllic, interspersed with lovely fragments of folksong from the Valois. Most of Gérard's poetry is third-rate : but his translations from the German give him a special

place beside Émile Deschamps in the Romantic movement, and above all the six sonnets called *Les Chimères*, with *Les Cydalises* and *Vers Dorés* and *Le Christ aux Olives*, rank him among the entirely original and accomplished poets of his age. A quite exceptional and irrational enchantment lurks in the dark syllables of *Les Chimères*. Apart from the appreciable beauty of their form—and externally they are pellucid as running water—these sonnets glow with the prestige of unaccountable associations and of names august, mysterious and potent, successive and distant influences brought together in a dream of sound. Gérard de Nerval is not the founder of modern Symbolism; but it needed perhaps the recent exploration of the incantatory virtue which is the sovereignty of words, to reveal the significance of this curious and unfortunate poet.

Œuvres Complètes: Paris, Calmann Lévy, 1877. M. Remy de Gourmont has written a charming prefatory note for a small separate edition of the *Chimères*, published by the *Société du Mercure de France*.

XLI

Fantaisie

Il est un air pour qui je donnerais
Tout Rossini, tout Mozart et tout Weber;
Un air très-vieux, languissant et funèbre,
Qui pour moi seul a des charmes secrets.

Or chaque fois que je viens à l'entendre,
De deux cents ans mon âme rajeunit:
C'est sous Louis treize . . . et je crois voir s'étendre
Un coteau vert que le couchant jaunit;

Puis un château de brique à coins de pierre,
Aux vitraux teints de rougeâtres couleurs,
Ceint de grands parcs, avec une rivière
Baignant ses pieds, qui coule entre des fleurs;

Puis une dame à sa haute fenêtre
Blonde aux yeux noirs, en ses habits anciens . . .
Que, dans une autre existence peut-être,
J'ai déjà vue!—et dont je me souviens!

1831.

XLII

El Desdichado

Je suis le ténébreux,—le veuf,—l'inconsolé,
Le prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie:
Ma seule *étoile* est morte,—et mon luth constellé
Porte le *soleil noir* de la *Mélancolie.*

Dans la nuit du tombeau, toi qui m'as consolé,
Rends-moi le Pausilippe et la mer d'Italie,
La *fleur* qui plaisait tant à mon cœur désolé
Et la treille où le pampre à la rose s'allie.

Suis-je Amour ou Phébus? . . . Lusignan ou Biron?
Mon front est rouge encor du baiser de la reine;
J'ai rêvé dans la grotte où nage la syrène . . .

Et j'ai deux fois vainqueur traversé l'Achéron
Modulant tour à tour sur la lyre d'Orphée
Les soupirs de la sainte et les cris de la fée.

[*Les Chimères.*

1853.

ÉMILE DESCHAMPS

1791-1871

Born at Bourges, the son of a public servant, he spent most of his long and uneventful life as a clerk in the Treasury. His first published poem, *La Paix Conquise*, dates from 1812, and is quite uninteresting: in the next few years he made a certain reputation as a writer of agreeable comedies; but it was not until 1828 that Émile Deschamps took rank as a romantic lyrist with the collection called *Études Françaises et Étrangères*. He had belonged to the movement from the first, was one of the founders, in 1823, of *La Muse Française*, and the Preface to his poems was recognised as the most important manifesto in favour of the new ideals, after the Preface to *Cromwell*, and far more conciliatory and more practical than that famous piece of writing. Deschamps never, perhaps, justified the promise of the *Études* in so far as original poetry is concerned. The by-paths throughout his career attracted him most. As a verse translator he did valuable work, collaborating with Vigny in a paraphrase of *Romeo and Juliet* (1829), turning *Macbeth* into a French tragedy which is, at any rate, an immense advance upon the timid adaptations made before him, and rendering a considerable number of German lyrics. He wrote also the *libretti* of several operas (collaborating notably with Meyerbeer and with the great Berlioz); but the attempt to ennoble so poor a trade was above or beneath his ingenuity and taste. He excelled in *vers de circonstance*, and frittered away much of his talent in compliments. The friend and almost the rival, for a moment, of the great poets of his generation, Deschamps lived to be almost forgotten, in spite of his versatile industry, and his alert interest in the development of French poetry in the hands of younger writers whom his modesty led him to praise somewhat indiscriminately. He spent his last years, appropriately, at Versailles.

As a poet, Émile Deschamps possesses, in default of more commanding characteristics, an unfailing grace, suppleness, the habit of concrete expression and a real facility in riming. Passion and mystery are almost absent from his sunny verse, but that his sensibility was more than skin-deep such a heartrending piece as 'Morte pour leur

faire plaisir' is proof enough. He is very French; yet no member of the Romantic group represents more abundantly than he that curiosity which looked beyond the frontier for the refreshment of French poetry—a real, though overestimated element in determining the movement. His masterly imitation of the Spanish *Romancero* had a distinct and lasting influence in this direction. And it must not be forgotten that he shares with Vigny the distinction of having introduced the long lyrical narrative—*poème*—into France.

Émile Deschamps had a brother, Antony (1800-1869), who was also a poet of some note, and is best known for his translation of the *Divine Comedy*. He had indeed, of the two, the stronger personality; but his original work, elegiac and satirical, is clouded by the mental disease which afflicted his life, and is too often verbose and only spasmodically excellent.

The works of Émile Deschamps have been collected into six volumes, with a Preface by Théophile Gautier.

XLIII

A Quelques Poètes

Quelque chose qui jette en mon cœur agité
Un saint étonnement que rien ne peut distraire,
C'est un sonnet de Tasse à Camoëns, son frère,
Son rival d'infortune et d'immortalité:

J'y vois que, sur un ton de calme dignité
Ils parlaient de leur muse, à l'aile téméraire,
De triomphes divins, de sceptre littéraire,
Comme deux rois, traitant de leur autorité.

Pourtant la destinée était loin d'être bonne
Au cygne de Ferrare, à l'aigle de Lisbonne;
Tous deux se répondaient au fond d'un hôpital!

Avec l'amour ingrat et la gloire muette
La faim les a tués, ces dieux!—Et maint poëte
Se plaint, chez Tortoni, que son astre est fatal!

[*Études françaises et étrangères.*

XLIV

Nizza

Nizza, je puis sans peine
Dans les beautés de Gêne,
Trouver plus douce reine,
Mais
Plus beaux yeux, jamais.

Tu peux trouver sans peine,
Plus haut seigneur dans Gêne
Pour te nommer sa reine,
Mais
Plus d'amour, jamais.

Tu peux, avec tes charmes,
Remplir mon cœur d'alarmes,
Et le noyer de larmes,
Mais
Le changer, jamais!

Je puis, mourant d'alarmes,
Les yeux brûlés de larmes
Maudire un jour tes charmes,
Mais
T'oublier, jamais!

[*Études françaises et étrangères.*

CHARLES-AUGUSTIN SAINTE-BEUVE

1804-1869

SAINTE-BEUVE won his rank as a great French man of letters by criticism—that is, by literary and historical portraits, the analysis of temperaments and the reconstruction of characters, for which upon the whole he cared more deeply than for art: the History of Port-Royal (1840-1848) and the vast collection of weekly articles—*Lundis*—contributed from 1849 onwards to *Le Constitutionnel* and *Le Moniteur*, are the achievements by which he is universally remembered. But he was also a poet: a little of his verse is exquisite, most of it is very interesting, and the diversity of the lyrical revival would be most inadequately presented without some example of his restless and inquisitive talent.

He was born of a Picard family at Boulogne, had a classical education and studied for a doctor; but he was already unusually well equipped for letters at the age of twenty, when, abandoning medicine, he found work on *Le Globe*, almost the only liberal paper disposed to treat the new poets sympathetically. Through the editor he met Victor Hugo, and a strong friendship sprang up between them. A wider, or at least a more systematic reader than any member of the *cénacle*, Sainte-Beuve in his early enthusiasm was impressed by the necessity of finding ancestors for the new Pleiad, and a superfluous anxiety to justify the revival historically was the underlying motive of his first book, *Tableau de la Poésie française au XVIme. siècle*, which appeared in 1828 and helped to resuscitate the older literature neglected for two hundred years. It is difficult to appreciate the reality of Sainte-Beuve's influence upon Hugo and the rest as a scholar, as an expert in points of poetical craftsmanship, as a free-thinker and a liberal: but undoubtedly he did them and a bewildered public an important service by defining and propagating the ideals of the first Romantic generation; and later he increased the debt as a critic of the foibles and exaggerations which clogged the movement, once it had grown self-conscious. Meanwhile he emulated the talent of his friends. *Joseph Delorme*, a book of prose and verse mingled, revealed a poet rather accomplished than spontaneous, a careful craftsman and a curious psychologist. *Les Consolations* (1830), more

frankly, perhaps more vulgarly Romantic in tone, and *Pensées d'Août* (1837) with *Notes et Sonnets* complete the published[1] contribution of Sainte-Beuve to the poetry of his times.

Sainte-Beuve was a man of books and also a man of pleasure. He had many friends and was capable of generous actions; but he showed himself often jealous and rancorous. His life had no great vicissitudes, but was marked by a certain number of sensational incidents—a duel with his old master Dubois in 1830; the obscure but at any rate discreditable quarrel with Hugo; ruptures and reconcilements with this editor and that; and his political equivocations sometimes gave scandal, as when, having rallied after a Republican youth to the 'party of order' and accepted a professorship from the Empire, he was hooted by the Paris students and compelled to resign his chair. His reception at the Academy in 1844, when it fell to Hugo to welcome him and both behaved (after their estrangement) with remarkable courtesy, was in its day a notable event. Sainte-Beuve had charge of the Mazarine Library from 1840 to 1848, lectured abroad at Lausanne and Liège, was made Professor of Latin Poetry at the Sorbonne and of French Literature at the Normal School; and in 1861 he was nominated to the Senate, but quarrelled noisily with the government later on, though, like many writers of anti-dynastic sympathies, he frequented the *salon* of the Princess Mathilde Bonaparte.

Sainte-Beuve has well described the poetry of *Joseph Delorme* as 'des peintures d'analyse sentimentale et des paysages de petite dimension.' He knew and often imitated certain English poets—Young, Crabbe, Southey, Wordsworth—and caught from them a taste for homely descriptions, a quiet and pensive manner; and perhaps they fortified his habits of introspection. All his poetry is the poetry of one in whom a sympathetic or even a pathological curiosity aspires to replace creative power. It is the poetry also of a profound sceptic, though we owe *Port-Royal* to a phase of deep if rather morbid interest in the phenomenon of faith—and to the personal influence of Lamennais.

The poetry of Sainte-Beuve was collected into one volume in 1840.

[1] A book called *Le Livre d'Amour*, poems inspired by Sainte-Beuve's passion for Madame Victor Hugo, was printed for him but never published. A recent biographer has largely excerpted the copy in the National Library. See, on this subject, M. G. Michaut's study *Le Livre d'Amour de Sainte-Beuve* (Paris: Fontemoing, 1905.)

XLV

Pensée d'Automne

Jardin du Luxembourg, novembre.

Au déclin de l'automne, il est souvent des jours
Où l'année, on dirait, va se tromper de cours.
Sous les grands marronniers, sous les platanes jaunes,
Sous les pâles rideaux des saules et des aunes,
Si par un levant pur ou par un beau couchant
L'on passe, et qu'on regarde aux arbres, tout marchant,
A voir sur un ciel blanc les noirs réseaux des branches,
Et les feuilles à jour, aux inégales tranches,
Creuses par le milieu, les deux bords en croissants,
Figurer au soleil mille bourgeons naissants ;
Dans une vapeur bleue, à voir tous ces troncs d'arbre
Nager confusément avec leurs dieux de marbre,
Et leur cime monter dans un azur si clair ;
A sentir le vent frais qui parfume encor l'air,
On oublie à ses pieds la pelouse flétrie,
Et la branche tombée et la feuille qui crie ;
Trois fois, près de partir, un charme vous retient,
Et l'on dit : ' N'est-ce pas le printemps qui revient

Avant la fin du jour il est encore une heure,
Où, pèlerin lassé qui touche à sa demeure,
Le soleil au penchant se retourne pour voir,
Malgré tant de sueurs regrettant d'être au soir;
Et, sous ce long regard où se mêle une larme,
La nature confuse a pris un nouveau charme ;
Elle hésite un moment, comme dans un adieu ;
L'horizon à l'entour a rougi tout en feu ;
La fleur en tressaillant a reçu la rosée ;
Le papillon revole à la rose baisée,
Et l'oiseau chante au bois en ramage brillant :
' N'est-ce pas le matin ? n'est-ce pas l'Orient ? '

Oh ! si pour nous aussi, dans cette vie humaine,
Il est au soir une heure, un instant qui ramène

Les amours du matin et leur volage essor,
Et la fraîche rosée, et les nuages d'or ;
Oh ! si le cœur, repris aux pensers de jeunesse
(Comme s'il espérait, hélas ! qu'elle renaisse),
S'arrête, se relève avant de défaillir,
Et s'oublie un seul jour à rêver sans vieillir,
Jouissons, jouissons de la douce journée
Et ne la troublons pas, cette heure fortunée ;
Car l'hiver pour les champs n'est qu'un bien court sommeil ;
Chaque matin au ciel reparaît le soleil ;
Mais qui sait si la tombe a son printemps encore,
Et si la nuit pour nous rallumera l'aurore ?

[*Joseph Delorme.*

XLVI

A David, Statuaire

(Sur une Statue d'Enfant.)

Divini opus Alcimedontis.—Virgile.

L'enfant ayant aperçu
(A l'insu
De sa mère, à peine absente)
Pendant au premier rameau
De l'ormeau
Une grappe mûrissante ;

L'enfant, à trois ans venu,
Fort et nu,
Qui jouait sur la belle herbe,
N'a pu, sans vite en vouloir,
N'a pu voir
Briller le raisin superbe.

Il a couru ! ses dix doigts
A la fois,
Comme autour d'une corbeille,
Tirent la grappe qui rit
Dans son fruit.
Buvez, buvez, jeune abeille !

La grappe est un peu trop haut ;
Donc il faut
Que l'enfant hausse sa lèvre.
Sa lèvre au fruit déjà prend,
Il s'y pend,
Il y pend comme la chèvre.

Oh ! comme il pousse en dehors
Tout son corps,
Petit ventre de Silène,
Reins cambrés, plus fléchissants
En leur sens
Que la vigne qu'il ramène.

A deux mains le grain foulé
A coulé ;
Douce liqueur étrangère !
Tel, plus jeune, il embrassait
Et pressait
La mamelle de sa mère.

Age heureux et sans soupçon !
Au gazon
Que vois-je ? un serpent qui glisse,
Le même serpent qu'on dit
Qui mordit,
Proche d'Orphée, Eurydice.

Pauvre enfant ! son pied levé
L'a sauvé ;
Rien ne l'avertit encore.—
C'est la vie avec son dard
Tôt ou tard !
C'est l'avenir ! qu'il l'ignore !

[*Pensées d'Août.*

XLVII

Dans ce cabriolet de place j'examine
L'homme qui me conduit, qui n'est plus que machine,

Hideux, à barbe épaisse, à longs cheveux collés :
Vice et vin et sommeil chargent ses yeux soûlés.
Comment l'homme peut-il ainsi tomber ? pensais-je.
—Mais Toi, qui vois si bien le mal à son dehors,
La crapule poussée à l'abandon du corps,
Comment tiens-tu ton âme au dedans ? Souvent pleine
Et chargée, es-tu prompt à la mettre en haleine ?
Le matin, plus soigneux que l'homme d'à-côté,
La laves-tu du songe épais ? et dégoûté,
Le soir, la laves-tu du jour gros de poussière ?
Ne la laisses-tu pas sans baptême et prière
S'engourdir et croupir, comme ce conducteur
Dont l'immonde sourcil ne sent pas sa moiteur ?

[*Pensées d'Août.*

ALFRED DE MUSSET

1810-1857

Alfred de Musset, who was born in Paris, was well descended, of an old family long settled in the Vendômois, and had literature in the blood. Colin Muset the *trouvère* may or may not have been among his ancestors, but Ronsard's Cassandre certainly was, as well as a kinsman of Joachim du Bellay; his father, a civil servant, was known as the biographer and editor of J.-J. Rousseau and had written novels and books of travel besides; his old cousin the Marquis de Musset-Cogners, and his mother's father and brother, were all people of taste and attainments;—and they were all eighteenth century people, sceptical, indulgent and polite. In Alfred a congenital tendency to hysteria showed itself early; but his childhood was particularly happy, and he won many distinctions at the Collège Henri Quatre, where the eldest son of the future King of the French was among his friends. His greatest friend through life was his elder brother Paul. As he grew up, he suffered more severely than most from the occasional hypochondria of immaturity, a common distemper aggravated, among the ardent and melancholy French youth of that generation, by the effects of a sceptical education and, perhaps, the depression following the tragical close of a brilliant age; and also, in his singular case, by precocious debauchery and especially by early symptoms of that alcoholism which was to be the great curse of his career.

While reading ostensibly for the bar and, a little later, playing with the study of medicine, young Musset, inflamed by Chénier, Lamartine, and Byron, had begun to versify. He was not quite eighteen when his first verses, purely imitative, were printed in a provincial paper, and he had already been introduced to the *cénacle* and its master by his schoolfellow Paul Foucher, the brother of Madame Victor Hugo. It was as the Benjamin of the Romantic family that he produced *Contes d'Espagne et d'Italie* at the very end of the year 1829: but the book, which scandalised old-fashioned readers by its frank diction and the insolence of frequent *enjambements* as well as by a somewhat puerile parade of Byronic cynicism (for *Mardoche* is, superficially at least, in the manner of *Beppo* and *Don Juan*), shocked the school of Hugo and Sainte-Beuve by a poverty of rime

which was partly a deliberate assertion of independence in questions of form. On the whole, however, this first volume, which reflects a petulant, careless, amorous and charming personality, was well received. *Les Marrons du Feu*, especially, was appreciated as that sparkling comedy deserved, and Musset was presently invited to write for a Paris theatre. He gave it one piece in 1830; but *La Nuit Vénitienne* (in prose) was an utter failure; and thenceforward he abandoned—not drama, but—the stage. Two out of three poems which filled his next volume were written in dramatic form. The longer of them, *La Coupe et les Lèvres*, though unequal, incoherent and manifestly unplayable, has fine impassioned outbursts, and the allegorical conception which gives it a sort of unity—the cup of pure happiness dashed from the lips of a sensualist by the fatality of sensualism—is sincere and profoundly personal. *A quoi rêvent les jeunes filles* is an engaging little play woven round a motive which M. Rostand's *Romanesques* recalls; and the spirited, if licentious and driftless, story of *Namouna* has a conquering suppleness of movement.

The year 1833 brought into the world the most Romantic of Musset's heroes, the sinister and sermonical Jacques Rolla. It saw also the first act of an episode in the poet's life over which no doubt too much ink has been spilled—to little purpose, since after George Sand's calumnious *Elle et Lui* and Paul de Musset's hasty *Lui et Elle*, and Mme. Louise Colet's novel on the same theme, and the indiscretions of a dozen friends and the conjectures of as many biographers, and even after the publication of the letters which passed between the poet and the author of *Indiana*, there is much that still defies the most morbid and even the most legitimate curiosity in the case. It is enough to say that, having won (without anything of a siege) that part of Mme. Dudevant's affections which was just then disposable, Alfred de Musset accompanied her to Italy; that at Venice he quickly tired out her patience by his eccentricities—which included drunken bouts—while she enraged him by her strict attention to the business of authorship; that he fell dangerously ill and she, while nursing him (whether any deceit was practised upon the sick man or no), fell presently in love with his Venetian doctor. They agreed to part and Musset, now convalescent, returned to Paris; but George Sand and the physician followed before many months, and an equivocal situation threatening a *redintegratio amoris*, in which Pagello grew gradually aware that he was playing a ridiculous personage, was prolonged with alternations of storm and calm until—

in May 1835—these astonishing lovers had discovered for the third or fourth time a fundamental incongruity of temperament. The unedifying story ends with Mme. Dudevant's return to her home in Berry.

It was, beyond all doubt, that one of Musset's many adventures of the heart (not to speak of mere caprices, which were numberless) which left the most enduring and the bitterest impression; but it is no less certain that his genius was not, as has sometimes been hastily supposed, ruined by the experience. The next few years were the most fruitful in his life. His greatest lyrical effort—the four *Nuits* —his elegy on the Malibran, the famous lines to Lamartine, and many others of his best personal poems, the most Attic of his prose tales, and several of the immortal prose comedies which as much as his poetry must count among the literary glories of that age—all this and much of lesser consequence was produced between 1835 and 1842.

From this date onwards his production slackened, though it can hardly be said that the quality of his infrequent writing deteriorated; and there is little more to tell about his life, which was almost divided between a sick-bed and the haunts of deleterious pleasure. Of his relations with Rachel, the Princess Bolgiojoso and other notable women there is no need to speak. He had other friends who clung to him. He had moments of natural gaiety, fits of hysterical despair and some velleities of religion; certain public successes partly consoled him for the consciousness of a decline. His delicate, fantastic, tender and witty prose comedies were rescued from oblivion by the actress Mme. Allan in 1847 and, one after another, won greater popularity than belongs perhaps to any other Romantic dramas. He was elected to the Academy in 1852. His death was almost unnoticed.

If the rank of Alfred de Musset among the greater French poets of the last century is still uncertain, it is not that his positive merits—of which the chief is certainly the gift of tears—are ever seriously disputed. He is eminently a poet of disillusion: it was Flaubert who said—'La désillusion est le propre des faibles.' Transparent spontaneity is his inalienable charm; and if, in elegy at least, it is almost sufficient to communicate personal emotion and principally the dear pains of memory, not even Lamartine is his superior as an elegiac poet. But every one will not accept the poetic condensed in the famous line—

Le mélodrame est bon où Margot a pleuré,

which indeed contains a denial that the *quality* of emotion matters. As an artist he has many obvious disabilities. He is not one of those who lived (in the words of Leconte de Lisle) in constant communion with the sensible world: imagery is not the very stuff of his style. His verse is agile and various, but wants plenitude, amplitude and continuity; he disdained the element of rime, and his rhythmical originality is almost bounded by 'overflowing' phrases interposed with more boldness than significance. Composition is a quality which his longer poems scarcely show. But in story, epistle and light satire Musset is the only representative in his age of a traditional elegance, vivacity and Atticism. He excels in the tone of conversation, and his familiarity with Mathurin Régnier and La Fontaine and the stories of Voltaire stood him in good stead. But taste, sense, wit were innate in him. After his nonage he openly dissociated himself from the extravagances and even from the glorious conquests of Romanticism. There was in Musset a classicist, born out of due time, even though no poet among his contemporaries is more pathetically subjective.

A complete edition of the works of Alfred de Musset is in course of publication (Paris: Garnier): the editor is the well-known biographer M. Edmond Biré.

XLVIII

Ballade a la Lune

C'était, dans la nuit brune,
Sur le clocher jauni,
La lune,
Comme un point sur un i.

Lune, quel esprit sombre
Promène au bout d'un fil,
Dans l'ombre,
Ta face et ton profil?

Es-tu l'œil du ciel borgne?
Quel chérubin cafard
Nous lorgne
Sous ton masque blafard?

N'es-tu rien qu'une boule ?
Qu'un grand faucheux bien gras
Qui roule
Sans pattes et sans bras ?

Es-tu, je t'en soupçonne,
Le vieux cadran de fer
Qui sonne
L'heure aux damnés d'enfer ?

Sur ton front qui voyage
Ce soir ont-ils compté
Quel âge
A leur éternité ?

Est-ce un ver qui te ronge,
Quand ton disque noirci
S'allonge
En croissant rétréci ?

Qui t'avait éborgnée
L'autre nuit ? T'étais-tu
Cognée
A quelque arbre pointu ?

Car tu vins, pâle et morne,
Coller sur mes carreaux
Ta corne,
A travers les barreaux.

Va, lune moribonde,
Le beau corps de Phœbé
La blonde
Dans la mer est tombé.

Tu n'en es que la face,
Et déjà, tout ridé,
S'efface
Ton front dépossédé.

Rends-nous la chasseresse
Blanche, au sein virginal,
Qui presse
Quelque cerf matinal !

Oh ! sous le vert platane,
Sous les frais coudriers,
Diane,
Et ses grands lévriers !

Le chevreau noir qui doute,
Pendu sur un rocher,
L'écoute,
L'écoute s'approcher.

Et, suivant leurs curées,
Par les vaux, par les blés,
Ses prées,
Ses chiens s'en sont allés.

Oh ! le soir, dans la brise,
Phœbé, sœur d'Apollo,
Surprise
A l'ombre, un pied dans l'eau !

Phœbé qui, la nuit close,
Aux lèvres d'un berger
Se pose,
Comme un oiseau léger.

Lune, en notre mémoire,
De tes belles amours
L'histoire
T'embellira toujours.

Et toujours rajeunie,
Tu seras du passant
Bénie,
Pleine lune ou croissant.

T'aimera le vieux pâtre
Seul, tandis qu'à ton front
D'albâtre
Ses dogues aboieront.

T'aimera le pilote
Dans son grand bâtiment
Qui flotte
Sous le clair firmament,

Et la fillette preste
Qui passe le buisson,
Pied leste
En chantant sa chanson.

Comme un ours à la chaîne,
Toujours sous tes yeux bleus
Se traîne
L'Océan montueux.

Et, qu'il vente ou qu'il neige,
Moi-même, chaque soir,
Que fais-je,
Venant ici m'asseoir ?

Je viens voir à la brune
Sur le clocher jauni
La lune
Comme un point sur un i.

[*Premières poésies.*

XLIX

CHANSON

J'ai dit à mon cœur, à mon faible cœur :
N'est-ce point assez d'aimer sa maîtresse ?
Et ne vois-tu pas que changer sans cesse,
C'est perdre en désirs le temps du bonheur ?

Il m'a répondu : Ce n'est point assez
Ce n'est point assez d'aimer sa maîtresse :
Et ne vois-tu pas que changer sans cesse
Nous rend doux et chers les plaisirs passés ?

J'ai dit à mon cœur, à mon faible cœur :
N'est-ce point assez de tant de tristesse ;
Et ne vois-tu pas que changer sans cesse
C'est à chaque pas trouver la douleur ?

Il m'a répondu : Ce n'est point assez,
Ce n'est point assez de tant de tristesse ;
Et ne vois-tu pas que changer sans cesse
Nous rend doux et chers les chagrins passés ?

[*Premières poésies.*

L

Chanson

A Saint-Blaise, à la Zuecca,
Vous étiez, vous étiez bien aise
A Saint-Blaise.
A Saint-Blaise, à la Zuecca,
Nous étions bien là.

Mais de vous en souvenir
Prendrez-vous la peine ?
Mais de vous en souvenir
Et d'y revenir.

A Saint-Blaise, à la Zuecca,
Dans les prés fleuris cueillir la verveine.
A Saint-Blaise, à la Zuecca
Vivre et mourir là !

[*Poésies Nouvelles.*

Venise, 3 *février* 1838.

LI

La Nuit de Décembre

LE POÈTE

Du temps que j'étais écolier,
Je restais un soir à veiller
Dans notre salle solitaire.
Devant ma table vint s'asseoir
Un pauvre enfant vêtu de noir,
Qui me ressemblait comme un frère.

Son visage était triste et beau :
A la lueur de mon flambeau,
Dans mon livre ouvert il vint lire.
Il pencha son front sur ma main,
Et resta jusqu'au lendemain,
Pensif, avec un doux sourire.

Comme j'allais avoir quinze ans,
Je marchais un jour, à pas lents,
Dans un bois, sur une bruyère.
Au pied d'un arbre vint s'asseoir
Un jeune homme vêtu de noir,
Qui me ressemblait comme un frère.

Je lui demandai mon chemin ;
Il tenait un luth d'une main,
De l'autre, un bouquet d'églantine.
Il me fit un salut d'ami,
Et, se détournant à demi,
Me montra du doigt la colline.

A l'âge où l'on croit à l'amour,
J'étais seul dans ma chambre un jour,
Pleurant ma première misère.
Au coin de mon feu vint s'asseoir
Un étranger vêtu de voir,
Qui me ressembla comme un frère.

Il était morne et soucieux :
D'une main il montrait les cieux,
Et de l'autre il tenait un glaive.
De ma peine il semblait souffrir,
Mais il ne poussa qu'un soupir,
Et s'évanouit comme un rêve.

A l'âge où l'on est libertin,
Pour boire un toast en un festin,
Un jour je soulevai mon verre.
En face de moi vint s'asseoir
Un convive vêtu de noir,
Qui me ressemblait comme un frère.

Il secouait sous son manteau
Un haillon de pourpre en lambeau.
Sur sa tête un myrte stérile,
Son bras maigre cherchait le mien,
Et mon verre, en touchant le sien,
Se brisa dans ma main débile.

Un an après, il était nuit,
J'étais à genoux près du lit
Où venait de mourir mon père.
Au chevet du lit vint s'asseoir
Un orphelin vêtu de noir,
Qui me ressemblait comme un frère.

Ses yeux étaient noyés de pleurs ;
Comme les anges de douleurs,
Il était couronné d'épine ;
Son luth à terre était gisant,
Sa pourpre de couleur de sang,
Et son glaive dans sa poitrine.

Je m'en suis si bien souvenu
Que je l'ai toujours reconnu
A tous les instants de ma vie.
C'est une étrange vision ;
Et cependant, ange ou démon,
J'ai vu partout cette ombre amie.

Lorsque plus tard, las de souffrir,
Pour renaître ou pour en finir,
J'ai voulu m'exiler de France ;
Lorsqu' impatient de marcher
J'ai voulu partir, et chercher
Les vestiges d'une espérance ;

A Pise au pied de l'Apennin ;
A Cologne, en face du Rhin ;
A Nice, au penchant des vallées ;
A Florence, au fond des palais ;
A Brigues, dans les vieux chalets ;
Au sein des Alpes désolées ;

A Gênes, sous les citronniers ;
A Vevey, sous les verts pommiers ;
Au Havre, devant l'Atlantique ;
A Venise, à l'affreux Lido,
Où vient sur l'herbe d'un tombeau
Mourir la pâle Adriatique ;

Partout où, sous ces vastes cieux,
J'ai lassé mon cœur et mes yeux,
Saignant d'une éternelle plaie ;
Partout où le boiteux Ennui,
Traînant ma fatigue après lui,
M'a promené sur une claie ;

Partout où, sans cesse altéré
De la soif d'un monde ignoré
J'ai suivi l'ombre de mes songes ;
Partout où, sans avoir vécu,
J'ai revu ce que j'avais vu,
La face humaine et ses mensonges ;

Partout où, le long des chemins,
J'ai posé mon front sur mes mains
Et sangloté comme une femme ;
Partout où j'ai, comme un mouton
Qui laisse sa laine au buisson,
Senti se dénuer mon âme ;

Partout où j'ai voulu dormir,
Partout où j'ai voulu mourir,
Partout où j'ai touché la terre,
Sur ma route est venu s'asseoir
Un malheureux vêtu de noir,
Qui me ressemblait comme un frère.

Qui donc es-tu, toi que dans cette vie
Je vois toujours sur mon chemin?
Je ne puis croire, à ta mélancolie,
Que tu sois mon mauvais Destin.
Ton doux souris a trop de patience,
Tes larmes ont trop de pitié.
En te voyant, j'aime la Providence.
Ta douleur même est sœur de ma souffrance;
Elle resemble à l'amitié.

Qui donc es-tu?—Tu n'es pas mon bon ange;
Jamais tu ne viens m'avertir.
Tu vois mes maux (c'est une chose étrange!)
Et tu me regardes souffrir.
Depuis vingt ans tu marches dans ma voie,
Et je ne saurais t'appeler.
Qui donc es-tu, si c'est Dieu qui t'envoie?
Tu me souris sans partager ma joie,
Tu me plains sans me consoler!

Ce soir encor je t'ai vu m'apparaître;
C'était par une triste nuit.
L'aile des vents battait à ma fenêtre;
J'étais seul, courbé sur mon lit.
J'y regardais une place chérie,
Tiède encor d'un baiser brûlant:
Et je songeais comme la femme oublie,
Et je sentais un lambeau de ma vie
Qui se déchirait lentement.

Je rassemblais des lettres de la veille,
Des cheveux, des débris d'amour.

Tout ce passé me criait à l'oreille
Ses éternels serments d'un jour.
Je contemplais ces reliques sacrées,
Qui me faisaient trembler la main :
Larmes du cœur par le cœur dévorées,
Et que les yeux qui les avaient pleurées
Ne reconnaîtront plus demain !

J'enveloppais dans un morceau de bure
Ces ruines des jours heureux.
Je me disais qu'ici-bas ce qui dure,
C'est une mèche de cheveux.
Comme un plongeur dans une mer profonde,
Je me perdais dans tant d'oubli.
De tous côtés j'y retournais la sonde,
Et je pleurais seul, loin des yeux du monde,
Mon pauvre amour enseveli.

J'allais poser le sceau de cire noire
Sur ce fragile et cher trésor.
J'allais le rendre, et, n'y pouvant pas croire,
En pleurant j'en doutais encor.
Ah ! faible femme, orgueilleuse insensée,
Malgré toi tu t'en souviendras !
Pourquoi, grand Dieu ! mentir à sa pensée ?
Pourquoi ces pleurs, cette gorge oppressée,
Ces sanglots, si tu n'aimais pas ?

Oui, tu languis, tu souffres et tu pleures ;
Mais ta chimère est entre nous.
Eh bien, adieu ! Vous compterez les heures
Qui me sépareront de vous.
Partez, partez, et dans ce cœur de glace
Emportez l'orgueil satisfait.
Je sens encor le mien jeune et vivace,
Et bien des maux pourront y trouver place
Sur le mal que vous m'avez fait.

Partez, partez ! la Nature immortelle
N'a pas tout voulu vous donner.
Ah ! pauvre enfant, qui voulez être belle,
Et ne savez pas pardonner !
Allez, allez, suivez la destinée ;
Qui vous perd n'a pas tout perdu.
Jetez au vent notre amour consumée ;—
Éternel Dieu ! toi que j'ai tant aimée,
Si tu pars, pourquoi m'aimes-tu ?

Mais tout à coup j'ai vu dans la nuit sombre
Une forme glisser sans bruit.
Sur mon rideau j'ai vu passer une ombre ;
Elle vient s'asseoir sur mon lit.
Qui donc es-tu, morne et pâle visage,
Sombre portrait vêtu de noir ?
Que me veux-tu, triste oiseau de passage ?
Est-ce un vain rêve ? est-ce ma propre image
Que j'aperçois dans ce miroir ?

Qui donc es-tu, spectre de ma jeunesse,
Pèlerin que rien n'a lassé ?
Dis-moi pourquoi je te trouve sans cesse
Assis dans l'ombre où j'ai passé.
Qui donc es-tu, visiteur solitaire,
Hôte assidu de mes douleurs ?
Qu'as-tu donc fait pour me suivre sur terre ?
Qui donc es-tu, qui donc es-tu, mon frère,
Qui n'apparais qu'au jour des pleurs ?

La Vision

— Ami, notre père est le tien.
Je ne suis ni l'ange gardien
Ni le mauvais destin des hommes.
Ceux que j'aime, je ne sais pas
De quel côté s'en vont leurs pas
Sur ce peu de fange où nous sommes.

Je ne suis ni dieu ni démon,
Et tu m'as nommé par mon nom,
Quand tu m'as appelé ton frère;
Où tu vas, j'y serai toujours,
Jusques au dernier de tes jours,
Où j'irai m'asseoir sur ta pierre.

Le ciel m'a confié ton cœur.
Quand tu seras dans la douleur,
Viens à moi sans inquiétude,
Je te suivrai sur le chemin;
Mais je ne puis toucher ta main;
Ami, je suis la Solitude.

[*Poésies Nouvelles.*

Novembre 1835.

LII

TRISTESSE

J'ai perdu ma force et ma vie,
Et mes amis et ma gaîté;
J'ai perdu jusqu'à la fierté
Qui faisait croire à mon génie.

Quand j'ai connu la Vérité,
J'ai cru que c'était une amie;
Quand je l'ai comprise et sentie,
J'en étais déjà dégoûté.

Et pourtant elle est éternelle,
Et ceux qui se sont passés d'elle
Ici-bas ont tout ignoré.

Dieu parle, il faut qu'on lui réponde.
Le seul bien qui me reste au monde
Est d'avoir quelquefois pleuré.

Bury, 14 *juin* 1840.

LIII

Sur une Morte

Elle était belle, si la Nuit
Qui dort dans la sombre chapelle
Où Michel-Ange a fait son lit,
Immobile, peut être belle.

Elle était bonne, s'il suffit
Qu'en passant la main s'ouvre et donne,
Sans que Dieu n'ait rien vu, rien dit,
Si l'or sans pitié fait l'aumône.

Elle pensait, si le vain bruit
D'une voix douce et cadencée,
Comme le ruisseau qui gémit,
Peut faire croire à la pensée.

Elle priait, si deux beaux yeux,
Tantôt s'attachant à la terre,
Tantôt se levant vers les cieux,
Peuvent s'appeler la prière.

Elle aurait souri, si la fleur
Qui ne s'est point épanouie
Pouvait s'ouvrir à la fraîcheur
Du vent qui passe et qui l'oublie.

Elle aurait pleuré, si sa main,
Sur son cœur froidement posée,
Eût jamais dans l'argile humain
Senti la céleste rosée.

Elle aurait aimé, si l'orgueil,
Pareil à la lampe inutile
Qu'on allume près d'un cercueil,
N'eût veillé sur son cœur stérile.

Elle est morte et n'a point vécu.
Elle faisait semblant de vivre.
De ses mains est tombé le livre
Dans lequel elle n'a rien lu.

Octobre 1842.

LIV

Chanson

Quand on perd, par triste occurrence,
Son espérance
Et sa gaîté,
Le remède au mélancolique,
C'est la musique
Et la beauté.

Plus oblige et peut davantage
Un beau visage
Qu'un homme armé,
Et rien n'est meilleur que d'entendre
Air doux et tendre
Jadis aimé !

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

1811-1872

He was a Southerner, born at Tarbes at the foot of the Pyrenees, but brought up partly in Paris, where, at the Lycée Charlemagne, Gérard de Nerval was his schoolfellow, with others who were to make a mark in letters. Poetry was not young Gautier's first ambition: for two years he worked in a studio, but discovered in time that his talent for painting was secondary. He showed some verses to Petrus Borel, who praised them and introduced him to the author of *Les Orientales*. A little later came the battle of *Hernani*, in which the green silk and crimson velvet of Théophile Gautier, the most ardent of volunteers, did legendary service as emblems of revolt. His first book of poetry followed in the same year, at the moment of the July Revolution. *Albertus*, 'légende théologique' (1833), attracted more attention by its Gothic gruesomeness and agile irony. About the same time he rallied in prose, with abundance of good humour, the foibles of a merely snobbish and shallow Romanticism: the book was called *Les Jeune-France*, after a sect or confraternity to which he had himself adhered, with the wilder fledglings of that enthusiastic time. His next work was the audaciously conceived and brilliantly executed novel, *Mademoiselle de Maupin* which, with its petulant preface, caused some scandal on its appearance in 1835. Another romance, *Fortunio*, dates from 1838; and to the same year belongs *La Comédie de la Mort*, a work which marks the culmination of his first poetical period. From this time onward, much of Gautier's time and energy was absorbed by travel and journalism. *Tras los Montes* (1839), as well as the poetry called *España*, came of his wanderings across the Pyrenees; other delightful volumes of prose registered, between 1845 and 1870, his impressions of Turkey, Italy, Russia, Germany. At the same time he contributed all sorts of imaginative articles to reviews and newspapers, passed several yearly Salons in review, and from 1845 onward his dramatic criticism enlivened *Le Moniteur* and *Le Journal Officiel*. His most ephemeral work was always indefatigable, inventive, curious, often illuminating and never dull. And all the time he was producing durable art. In several romances, of which *Le Roman de la Momie* (1856) is the best known,

he rivalled Mérimée and anticipated Flaubert by using a considerable archaeology as the handmaid of imagination. His last book of poetry, *Émaux et Camées*, in which the old Romantic exuberance of colour, restlessness and extravagance of posture are replaced by a delicate irony, the exactitude of a miniaturist, and a wonderful ingenuity in varying the effects of a single measure, was published in 1852. With *Jettatura* (1857) and the fine picaresque romance *Le Capitaine Fracasse* (1863), the tale of his notable writings is complete. His dramatic compositions, comedies, caprices, and *ballets* are inferior; *Le Pierrot Posthume* (1845) is perhaps the most distinguished of them.

Gautier cared nothing for politics; he had a family to keep; and it seems unjust to reproach him with servility towards the government of December. He could never be seduced, at any rate, from his allegiance to his master Hugo. The Princess Mathilde, a friend to so many writers and artists whom nobody could call 'official,' made him her librarian: the fall of the Empire ruined him. He set to work courageously to retrieve his fortunes after the Commune, but overwork and disappointment had worn him out. He died in 1872, mourned by a host of friends.

Through an unusual acuity of some faculties and an unusual obtuseness of others, Gautier is the poet of his time who concerned himself most exclusively with appearances. His sphere is the visible, which he renders with equal opulence and precision. He is certainly not a realist; between the object and the representation, not thought nor passion, but the aesthetic emotion always intervened. His creations are as real as a picture; and indeed the much-misused compound, 'word-painting,' might have been invented for Gautier. He saw life as a work of art, sumptuously framed: his philosophy (if the word is not quite absurd in this application) might be summed up best in the *virtù* of the Italian Renaissance. He defined himself 'un homme pour qui le monde extérieur existe.' Another dictum, less well-known, ought to be quoted beside this: 'Je mange tous les jours un bifteck bien saignant.' It was in part his robust good sense which foresaw so early the eventual bankruptcy of Romanticism pure and simple; in part also an ineradicable respect for the classical virtues—order, measure, clearness, serenity. In a sense *Émaux et Camées* bridge the gulf between *Les Orientales* and *Poèmes Antiques*.

Gautier worshipped his art and its instrument. With his devotion

to the concrete, he is one of those who did most to renew the language; if his rhythmical sense was not strikingly original, his verse is nearly always irreproachable in form. Like all excellent craftsmen, he loved obstacles for their own sake, and no poet pursued perfection with more severity. It was these qualities which gave him so great an influence over his younger contemporaries and provoked Baudelaire's famous dedication, 'au poète impeccable, au parfait magicien-ès-lettres françaises.'

Most of Théophile Gautier's poetry has been published in several editions. It fills three volumes of Lemerre's *Petite Bibliothèque Littéraire.*

LV

Choc de Cavaliers

Hier il m'a semblé (sans doute j'étais ivre)
Voir sur l'arche d'un pont un choc de cavaliers
Tout cuirassés de fer, tout imbriqués de cuivre,
Et caparaçonnés de harnais singuliers.

Des dragons accroupis grommelaient sur leurs casques,
Des Méduses d'airain ouvraient leurs yeux hagards
Dans leurs grands boucliers aux ornements fantasques,
Et des nœuds de serpents écaillaient leurs brassards.

Par moments, du rebord de l'arcade géante,
Un cavalier blessé perdant son point d'appui,
Un cheval effaré tombait dans l'eau béante,
Gueule de crocodile entr'ouverte sous lui.

C'était vous, mes désirs, c'était vous, mes pensées,
Qui cherchiez à forcer le passage du pont,
Et vos corps tout meurtris sous leurs armes faussées
Dorment ensevelis dans le gouffre profond.

[*Poésies Diverses.*

LVI

Barcarolle

'Dites, la jeune belle!
Où voulez-vous aller?
La voile ouvre son aile,
La brise va souffler!

'L'aviron est d'ivoire,
Le pavillon de moire,
Le gouvernail d'or fin;
J'ai pour lest une orange,
Pour voile une aile d'ange,
Pour mousse un séraphin.

'Dites, la jeune belle!
Où voulez-vous aller?
La voile ouvre son aile,
La brise va souffler!

'Est-ce dans la Baltique,
Sur la mer Pacifique,
Dans l'île de Java?
Ou bien dans la Norvège,
Cueillir la fleur de neige,
Ou la fleur d'Angsoka?

'Dites, la jeune belle!
Où voulez-vous aller?
La voile ouvre son aile,
La brise va souffler!'

—'Menez-moi,' dit la belle,
'A la rive fidèle
Où l'on aime toujours.'
—'Cette rive, ma chère,
On ne la connaît guère
Au pays des amours.'

[*Poésies Diverses.*

LVII

Don Juan

Heureux adolescents dont le cœur s'ouvre à peine
Comme une violette à la première haleine
Du printemps qui sourit,
Ames couleur de lait, frais buissons d'aubépine
Où, sous le pur rayon, dans la pluie argentine
Tout gazouille et fleurit;

O vous tous qui sortez des bras de votre mère
Sans connaître la vie et la science amère,
Et qui voulez savoir,
Poètes et rêveurs! plus d'une fois sans doute,
Aux lisières des bois, en suivant votre route
Dans la rougeur du soir,

A l'heure enchanteresse où sur le bout des branches
On voit se becqueter les tourterelles blanches
Et les bouvreuils au nid,
Quand la nature lasse en s'endormant soupire,
Et que la feuille au vent vibre comme une lyre
Après le chant fini;

Quand le calme et l'oubli viennent à toutes choses,
Et que le sylphe rentre au pavillon des roses
Sous les parfums plié;
Émus de tout cela, plein d'ardeurs inquiètes,
Vous avez souhaité ma liste et mes conquêtes!
Vous m'avez envié

Les festins, les baisers sur les épaules nues,
Toutes ces voluptés à votre âge inconnues,
Aimable et cher tourment!
Zerline, Elvire, Anna, mes Romaines jalouses,
Mes beaux lis d'Albion, mes braves Andalouses,
Tout mon troupeau charmant.

Et vous vous êtes dit par la voix de vos âmes;
‘ Comment faisais-tu donc pour avoir plus de femmes
Que n'en a le sultan ?
Comment faisais-tu donc, malgré verrous et grilles,
Pour te glisser au lit des belles jeunes filles,
Heureux, heureux Don Juan !

‘ Conquérant oublieux, une seule de celles
Que tu n'inscrivais pas, une entre tes moins belles,
Ta plus modeste fleur,
Oh ! combien et longtemps nous l'eussions adorée,
Elle aurait embelli, dans une urne dorée,
L'autel de notre cœur.

Elle aurait parfumé, cette humble violette,
Dont sous l'herbe ton pied a fait ployer la tête,
Notre pâle printemps;
Nous l'aurions recueillie, et de nos pleurs trempée,
Cette étoile aux yeux bleus, dans le bal échappée
A tes doigts inconstants.

‘ Adorables frissons de l'amoureuse fièvre,
Ramiers qui descendez du ciel sur une lèvre,
Baisers âcres et doux,
Chutes du dernier voile, et vous, cascades blondes,
Cheveux d'or inondant un dos brun de vos ondes,
Quand vous connaîtrons-nous ? ’

Enfants, je les connais tous, ces plaisirs qu'on rêve.
Autour du tronc fatal l'antique serpent d'Ève
Ne s'est pas mieux tordu;
Aux yeux mortels, jamais dragon à tête d'homme
N'a d'un plus vif éclat fait reluire la pomme
De l'arbre défendu.

Souvent, comme des nids de fauvettes farouches,
Tout prêts à s'envoler, j'ai surpris sur des bouches
Des nids d'aveux tremblants;
J'ai serré dans mes bras de ravissants fantômes,
Bien des vierges en fleur m'ont versé les purs baumes
De leurs calices blancs.

Pour en avoir le mot, courtisanes rusées,
J'ai pressé, sous le fard, vos lèvres plus usées
Que le grès des chemins.
Égouts impurs où vont tous les ruisseaux du monde,
J'ai plongé sous vos flots; et toi, débauche immonde,
J'ai vu tes lendemains.

J'ai vu les plus purs fronts rouler après l'orgie,
Parmi les flots de vin, sur la nappe rougie,
J'ai vu les fins de bal
Et la sueur des bras, et la pâleur des têtes
Plus mornes que la Mort sous leurs boucles défaites
Au soleil matinal.

Comme un mineur qui suit une veine inféconde,
J'ai fouillé nuit et jour l'existence profonde
Sans trouver le filon;
J'ai demandé la vie à l'amour qui la donne,
Mais vainement; je n'ai jamais aimé personne
Ayant au monde un nom.

J'ai brûlé plus d'un cœur dont j'ai foulé la cendre,
Mais je restai toujours, comme la salamandre,
Froid au milieu du feu.
J'avais un idéal frais comme la rosée,
Une vision d'or, une opale irisée
Par le regard de Dieu;

Femme comme jamais sculpteur n'en a pétrie,
Type réunissant Cléopâtre et Marie,
Grâce, pudeur, beauté;
Une rose mystique, où nul ver ne se cache;
Les ardeurs du volcan et la neige sans tache
De la virginité!

Au carrefour douteux, Y grec de Pythagore,
J'ai pris la branche gauche, et je chemine encore
Sans arriver jamais.
Trompeuse Volupté, c'est toi que j'ai suivie!
Et peut-être, ô Vertu! l'énigme de la vie,
C'est toi qui le savais.

Que n'ai-je, comme Faust, dans ma cellule sombre,
Contemplé sur le mur la tremblante pénombre
Du microcosme d'or!
Que n'ai-je, feuilletant cabales et grimoires,
Auprès de mon fourneau, passé les heures noires
A chercher le trésor!

J'avais la tête forte, et j'aurais lu ton livre
Et bu ton vin amer, Science, sans être ivre
Comme un jeune écolier!
J'aurais contraint Isis à relever son voile,
Et du plus haut des cieux fait descendre l'étoile
Dans mon noir atelier.

N'écoutez pas l'Amour, car c'est un mauvais maître;
Aimer, c'est ignorer, et vivre, c'est connaître.
Apprenez, apprenez;
Jetez et rejetez à toute heure la sonde,
Et plongez plus avant sous cette mer profonde
Que n'ont fait nos aînés.

Laissez Léviathan souffler par ses narines,
Laissez le poids des mers au fond de vos poitrines
Presser votre poumon.
Fouillez les noirs écueils qu'on n'a pu reconnaître,
Et dans son coffre d'or vous trouverez peut-être
L'anneau de Salomon!

[*La Comédie de la Mort*, vii.

LVIII

Ribeira

Il est des cœurs épris du triste amour du laid.
Tu fus un de ceux-là, peintre à la rude brosse
Que Naple a salué du nom d'Espagnolet.

Rien ne put amollir ton âpreté féroce,
Et le splendide azur du ciel italien
N'a laissé nul reflet dans ta peinture atroce.

Chez toi, l'on voit toujours le noir Valencien,
Paysan hasardeux, mendiant équivoque,
More que le baptême à peine à fait chrétien.

Comme un autre le beau, tu cherches ce qui choque :
Les martyrs, les bourreaux, les gitanos, les gueux
Étalant un ulcère à côté d'une loque ;

Les vieux au chef branlant, au cuir jaune et rugueux,
Versant sur quelque Bible un flot de barbe grise,
Voilà ce qui convient à ton pinceau fougueux.

Tu ne dédaignes rien de ce que l'on méprise ;
Nul haillon, Ribeira, par toi n'est rebuté :
Le vrai, toujours le vrai, c'est ta seule devise !

Et tu sais revêtir d'une étrange beauté
Ces trois monstres abjects, effroi de l'art antique,
La Douleur, la Misère et la Caducité.

Pour toi pas d'Apollon, pas de Vénus pudique ;
Tu n'admets pas un seul de ces beaux rêves blancs
Taillés dans le paros ou dans le pentélique.

Il te faut des sujets sombres et violents
Où l'ange des douleurs vide ses noirs calices,
Où la hache s'émousse aux billots ruisselants.

Tu sembles enivré par le vin des supplices,
Comme un César romain dans sa pourpre insulté,
Ou comme un victimaire après vingt sacrifices.

Avec quelle furie et quelle volupté,
Tu retournes la peau du martyr qu'on écorche,
Pour nous en faire voir l'envers ensanglanté !

Aux pieds des patients comme tu mets la torche !
Dans le flanc de Caton comme tu fais crier
La plaie, affreuse bouche ouverte comme un porche !

D'où te vient, Ribeira, cet instinct meurtrier ?
Quelle dent t'a mordu, qui te donne la rage,
Pour tordre ainsi l'espèce humaine et la broyer ?

Que t'a donc fait le monde, et, dans tout ce carnage,
Quel ennemi secret de tes coups poursuis-tu ?
Pour tant de sang versé quel était donc l'outrage ?

Ce martyr, c'est le corps d'un rival abattu ;
Et ce n'est pas toujours au cœur de Prométhée
Que fouille l'aigle fauve avec son bec pointu.

De quelle ambition du ciel précipitée,
De quel espoir traîné par des coursiers sans frein,
Ton âme de démon était-elle agitée ?

Qu'avais-tu donc perdu pour être si chagrin ?
De quels amours tournés se composaient tes haines
Et qui jalousais-tu, toi, peintre souverain ?

Les plus grands cœurs, hélas ! ont les plus grandes peines ;
Dans la coupe profonde il tient plus de douleurs ;
Le ciel se venge ainsi sur des gloires humaines.

Un jour, las de l'horrible et des noires couleurs,
Tu voulus peindre aussi des corps blancs comme neige,
Des anges souriants, des oiseaux et des fleurs,

Des nymphes dans les bois que le satyre assiège,
Des amours endormis sur un sein frémissant,
Et tous ces frais motifs chers au moelleux Corrège ;

Mais tu ne sus trouver que du rouge de sang,
Et quand du haut des cieux, apportant l'auréole,
Sur le front de tes saints l'ange de Dieu descend,

En détournant les yeux, il la pose et s'envole !

[*España.*

Madrid, 1844.

LIX

La Mélodie et l'Accompagnement

La beauté, dans la femme, est une mélodie
Dont la toilette n'est que l'accompagnement.
Vous avez la beauté.—Sur ce motif charmant,
A chercher des accords votre goût s'étudie :

Tantôt c'est un corsage à la coupe hardie
Qui s'applique au contour, comme un baiser d'amant;
Tantôt une dentelle au feston écumant
Une fleur, un bijou qu'un reflet incendie.

La gaze et le satin ont des soirs triomphants;
D'autres fois une robe, avec deux plis de moire,
Aux épaules vous met deux ailes de victoire.

Mais de tous ces atours, ajustés ou bouffants,
Orchestre accompagnant votre grâce suprême,
Le cœur, comme d'un air, ne retient que le thème!'

[*Poésies Nouvelles.*

23 *avril* 1869.

LX

Variations sur le Carnaval de Venise

i

Dans la Rue

Il est un vieil air populaire
Par tous les violons raclé,
Aux abois des chiens en colère
Par tous les orgues nasillé.

Les tabatières à musique
L'ont sur leur répertoire inscrit;
Pour les serins il est classique,
Et ma grand'mère, enfant, l'apprit.

Sur cet air, pistons, clarinettes,
Dans les bals aux poudreux berceaux,
Font sauter commis et grisettes,
Et de leurs nids fuir les oiseaux.

La guinguette, sous la tonnelle
De houblon et de chèvrefeuil,
Fête, en braillant la ritournelle,
Le gai dimanche et l'argenteuil.

L'aveugle au basson qui pleurniche,
L'écorche en se trompant de doigts ;
La sébile aux dents, son caniche
Près de lui le grogne à mi-voix.

Et les petites guitaristes,
Maigres sous leurs minces tartans,
Le glapissent de leurs voix tristes
Aux tables des cafés chantants.

Paganini, le fantastique,
Un soir, comme avec un crochet,
A ramassé le thème antique
Du bout de son divin archet.

ii

Sur les Lagunes

Tra la, tra la, la, la, la laire !
Qui ne connaît pas ce motif ?
A nos mamans il a su plaire,
Tendre et gai, moqueur et plaintif :

L'air du Carnaval de Venise
Sur les canaux jadis chanté,
Et qu'un soupir de folle brise
Dans le ballet a transporté !

Il me semble, quand ou le joue
Voir glisser dans son bleu sillon
Une gondole avec sa proue
Faite en manche de violon.

Sur une gamme chromatique,
Le sein de perles ruisselant,
La Vénus de l'Adriatique
Sort de l'eau son corps rose et blanc.

Les dômes, sur l'azur des ondes
Suivant la phrase au pur contour,
S'enflent comme des gorges rondes
Que soulève un soupir d amour.

L'esquif aborde et me dépose,
Jetant son amarre au pilier,
Devant une façade rose,
Sur le marbre d'un escalier.

Avec ses palais, ses gondoles,
Ses mascarades sur la mer,
Ses doux chagrins, ses gaîtés folles,
Tout Venise vit dans cet air.

Une frêle corde qui vibre
Refait sur un pizzicato,
Comme autrefois joyeuse et libre,
La ville de Canaletto !

iii

Carnaval

Venise pour le bal s'habille.
De paillettes tout étoilé,
Scintille, fourmille et babille
Le carnaval bariolé.

Arlequin, nègre par son masque,
Serpent par ses mille couleurs,
Rosse d'une note fantasque
Cassandre son souffre-douleurs.

Battant de l'aile avec sa manche
Comme un pingouin sur un écueil,
Le blanc Pierrot, par une blanche,
Passe la tête et cligne l'œil.

Le Docteur bolonais rabâche
Avec la basse aux sous traînés ;
Polichinelle, qui se fâche,
Se trouve une croche pour nez.

Heurtant Trivelin qui se mouche
Avec un trille extravagant,
A Colombine Scaramouche
Rend son éventail ou son gant.

Sur une cadence se glisse
Un domino ne laissant voir
Qu'un malin regard en coulisse
Aux paupières de satin noir.

Ah ! fine barbe de dentelle
Que fait voler un souffle pur,
Cet arpège m'a dit : C'est elle !
Malgré tes réseaux, j'en suis sûr,

Et j'ai reconnu, rose et fraîche,
Sous l'affreux profil de carton,
Sa lèvre au fin duvet de pêche,
Et la mouche de son menton.

iv

Clair de Lune sentimental

A travers la folle risée
Que Saint-Marc renvoie au Lido,
Une gamme monte en fusée,
Comme au clair de lune un jet d'eau . .

A l'air qui jase d'un ton bouffe
Et secoue au vent ses grelots,
Un regret, ramier qu'on étouffe,
Par instant mêle ses sanglots.

Au loin, dans la brume sonore
Comme un rêve presque effacé,
J'ai revu, pâle et triste encore,
Mon vieil amour de l'an passé.

Mon âme en pleurs s'est souvenu
De l'avril, où, guettant au bois
La violette à sa venue,
Sous l'herbe nous mêlions nos doigts . . .

Cette note de chanterelle,
Vibrant comme l'harmonica,
C'est la voix enfantine et grêle,
Flèche d'argent qui me piqua.

Le son en est si faux, si tendre,
Si moqueur, si doux si cruel,
Si froid, si brûlant, qu'à l'entendre
On ressent un plaisir mortel,

Et que mon cœur, comme la voûte
Dont l'eau pleure dans un bassin,
Laisse tomber goutte par goutte
Ses larmes rouges dans son sein.

Jovial et mélancolique,
Ah ! vieux thème du carnaval,
Où le rire aux larmes réplique,
Que ton charme m'a fait de mal !

[*Émaux et Camées.*

AUGUSTE BARBIER

1805-1882

He was by birth a Parisian, the son of a lawyer, and was bred for the law. But the Romantic fever laid hold on him, and he had begun to rime and to frequent the society of poets before the Bourbons were overthrown in 1830. In that crisis he saw with disgust the indecent adulation of the victorious people by men who, having thriven under the Restoration, were now anxious not only to keep their own, but to share the plunder of fallen power. *La Curée*, first printed in *La Revue de Paris* in 1830, expressed with a vigour which has no parallel between D'Aubigné's *Tragicques* and Hugo's *Châtiments*, and in the form consecrated by André Chénier, the indignant contempt of a patriot gifted with the historical imagination. It is, with *La Popularité* and an anti-Napoleonic satire, *L'Idole*, the poem which keeps the name of Barbier illustrious: but it is easier to explain than to excuse the injustice by which his subsequent work has been generally ignored. Travel in Italy, where his friend Brizeux accompanied him, and sincere communion with the artists and poets of Italy, inspired the chaste and delicate poetry assembled under the title *Il Pianto*: he saw England, observed the peculiar inequalities of English society and condemned them in the poignant but desultory and perhaps jaundiced poem *Lazare*. In all his poetry a classical sense of the gravity of words, and a passion that finds its own rhythms, strike every attentive reader. Barbier wrote, besides poems, some not very distinguished novels and tales; he translated from the English *Julius Caesar* and *The Antient Mariner*; and with L. de Wailly he supplied the *libretto* of Berlioz's fine opera *Benvenuto Cellini*. The latter part of his life was almost unproductive.

The principal poetry of Auguste Barbier is to be found in one volume (Lemerre). A volume of *Poésies Posthumes* was published in 1884. *Iambes* appeared in 1831; *Il Pianto*, *Lazare* in 1833; *Chants civils et religieux* in 1841; *Rimes héroïques* in 1843; *Silves* in 1864; *Satires* in 1865.

LXI

PROLOGUE

On dira qu'à plaisir je m'allume la joue;
Que mon vers aime à vivre et ramper dans la boue;
Qu'imitant Diogène au cynique manteau,
Devant tout monument je roule mon tonneau;
Que j'insulte aux grands noms, et que ma jeune plume
Sur le peuple et les rois frappe avec amertume:
Que me font, après tout, les vulgaires abois
De tous les charlatans qui donnent de la voix,
Les marchands de pathos et les faiseurs d'emphase,
Et tous les baladins qui dansent sur la phrase?
Si mon vers est trop cru, si sa bouche est sans frein,
C'est qu'il sonne aujourd'hui dans un siècle d'airain.
Le cynisme des mœurs doit salir la parole,
Et la haine du mal enfante l'hyperbole.
Or donc, je puis braver le regard pudibond:
Mon vers rude et grossier est honnête homme au fond.

[*Les Iambes.*

LXII

LA CURÉE

i

Oh! lorsqu'un lourd soleil chauffait les grandes dalles
Des ponts et de nos quais déserts,
Que les cloches hurlaient, que la grêle des balles
Sifflaient et pleuvaient par les airs;
Que dans Paris entier, comme la mer qui monte,
Le peuple soulevé grondait,
Et qu'au lugubre accent des vieux canons de fonte
La *Marseillaise* répondait,
Certes on ne voyait pas, comme au jour où nous sommes,
Tant d'uniformes à la fois;
C'était sous des haillons que battaient les cœurs d'hommes;
C'était alors de sales doigts

Qui chargeaient les mousquets et renvoyaient la foudre ;
C'était la bouche aux vils jurons
Qui mâchait la cartouche, et qui, noire de poudre,
Criait aux citoyens : Mourons !

ii

Quant à tous ces beaux fils aux tricolores flammes,
Au beau linge, au frac élégant,
Ces hommes en corset, ces visages de femmes,
Héros du boulevard de Gand,
Que faisaient-ils, tandis qu'à travers la mitraille,
Et sous le sabre détesté,
La grande populace et la sainte canaille
Se ruaient à l'immortalité ?
Tandis que tout Paris se jonchait de merveilles,
Ces messieurs tremblaient dans leur peau,
Pâles, suant la peur, et la main aux oreilles,
Accroupis derrière un rideau.

iii

C'est que la Liberté n'est pas une comtesse
Du noble faubourg Saint-Germain,
Une femme qu'un cri fait tomber en faiblesse,
Qui met du blanc et du carmin :
C'est une forte femme aux puissantes mamelles,
A la voix rauque, aux durs appas,
Qui, du brun sur la peau, du feu dans les prunelles,
Agile et marchant à grands pas,
Se plaît aux cris du peuple, aux sanglantes mêlées,
Aux longs roulements des tambours,
A l'odeur de la poudre, aux lointaines volées
Des cloches et des canons sourds ;
Qui ne prend ses amours que dans la populace,
Qui ne prête son large flanc
Qu'à des gens forts comme elle, et qui veut qu'on l'embrasse
Avec des bras rouges de sang.

IV

C'est la vierge fougueuse, enfant de la Bastille,
Qui jadis, lorsqu'elle apparut
Avec son air hardi, ses allures de fille,
Cinq ans mit tout le peuple en rut;
Qui, plus tard, entonnant une marche guerrière,
Lasse de ses premiers amants,
Jeta là son bonnet, et devint vivandière
D'un capitaine de vingt ans:
C'est cette femme enfin, qui, toujours belle et nue
Avec l'écharpe aux trois couleurs,
Dans nos murs mitraillés tout à coup reparue,
Vient de sécher nos yeux en pleurs,
De remettre en trois jours une haute couronne
Aux mains des Français soulevés,
D'écraser une armée et de broyer un trône
Avec quelques tas de pavés.

V

Mais, ô honte! Paris, si beau dans sa colère;
Paris, si plein de majesté
Dans ce jour de tempête où le vent populaire
Déracina la royauté;
Paris, si magnifique avec ses funérailles,
Ses débris d'hommes, ses tombeaux,
Ses chemins dépavés et ses pans de murailles
Troués comme de vieux drapeaux:
Paris, cette cité de lauriers toute ceinte,
Dont le monde entier est jaloux,
Que les peuples émus appellent tous la sainte,
Et qu'ils ne nomment qu'à genoux;
Paris n'est maintenant qu'une sentine impure,
Un égout sordide et boueux,
Où mille noirs courants de limon et d'ordure
Viennent traîner leurs flots honteux;

Un taudis regorgeant de faquins sans courage,
D'effrontés coureurs de salons,
Qui vont de porte en porte, et d'étage en étage,
Gueusant quelques bouts de galons ;
Une halle cynique aux clameurs insolentes,
Où chacun cherche à déchirer
Un misérable coin de guenilles sanglantes
Du pouvoir qui vient d'expirer.

VI

Ainsi, quand désertant sa bauge solitaire,
Le sanglier, frappé de mort,
Est là, tout palpitant, étendu sur la terre
Et sous le soleil qui le mord ;
Lorsque, blanchi de bave et la langue tirée,
Ne bougeant plus en ses liens,
Il meurt, et que la trompe a sonné la curée
A toute la meute des chiens,
Toute la meute, alors, comme une vague immense,
Bondit ; alors chaque mâtin
Hurle en signe de joie, et prépare d'avance
Ses larges crocs pour le festin ;
Et puis vient la cohue, et les abois féroces
Roulent de vallons en vallons ;
Chiens courants et limiers, et dogues, et molosses,
Tout s'élance, et tout crie : Allons !
Quand le sanglier tombe et roule sur l'arène,
Allons, allons ! les chiens sont rois !
Le cadavre est à nous ; payons-nous notre peine,
Nos coups de dents et nos abois.
Allons ! nous n'avons plus de valet qui nous fouaille
Et qui se pende à notre cou :
Du sang chaud, de la chair, allons, faisons ripaille,
Et gorgeons-nous tout notre soûl !
Et tous, comme ouvriers que l'on met à la tâche,
Fouillent ses flancs à plein museau,
Et de l'ongle et des dents travaillent sans relâche,
Car chacun en veut un morceau ;

Car il faut au chenil que chacun d'eux revienne
Avec un os demi-rongé,
Et que trouvant au seuil son orgueilleuse chienne,
Jalouse et le poil allongé,
Il lui montre sa gueule encor rouge, et qui grogne,
Son os dans les dents arrêté,
Et lui crie, en jetant son quartier de charogne:
'Voici ma part de royauté!'

[*Les Iambes.*

Août 1830.

LXIII

TITIEN

Quand l'art italien comme un fleuve autrefois
S'en venait à passer par une grande ville,
Ce n'était pas alors une eau rare et stérile,
Mais un fleuve puissant à la superbe voix.

Il allait inondant les palais jusqu'aux toits,
Les dômes suspendus par une main débile;
Il reflétait partout dans son cristal mobile
Le manteau bleu des cieux et la pourpre des rois;

Puis avec majesté sur la vague aplanie
Il emportait alors un homme de génie,
Un grand Vénitien, à l'énorme cerveau;

Et prenant avec lui sa course vagabonde,
Il le roulait un siècle au courant de son onde,
Et ne l'abandonnait qu'aux serres d'un fléau.

[*Il Pianto.*

AUGUSTE BRIZEUX

1803-1858

It is said that the family of Brizeux, long settled in Brittany, was remotely of Irish origin. The poet, the son of a former naval surgeon, was born at Lorient. His first master was the rector of the little parish of Arzannô, near Quimperlé; and he continued his education at Vannes, and at Arras. A short comedy in verse, *Racine*, written in collaboration with P. Busoni (the future editor of Casanova) and produced at the Théâtre Français in 1827, was followed four years later by an idyllic rhapsody—*Marie*. In 1834, between two visits to Italy in company with his lifelong friend Auguste Barbier, he lectured as Ampère's substitute at the Marseilles Athenaeum on the history of French poetry. Italian art and the Italian poetry strongly influenced Brizeux's talent, particularly on its formal side. While in Italy he began, and finished in France, a prose translation of the *Divine Comedy* which has still a considerable reputation. In 1841 appeared *Les Ternaires*, a lyrical volume inspired wholly by his travels: the obscure title was afterwards changed to *La Fleur d'Or*. But Brittany claimed him. At Lorient in 1844 Brizeux brought out a little book of rimes in Breton, *Télen Arvor* (*La Harpe d'Armorique*), which was followed by a collection of proverbs also in the Celtic tongue of the Peninsula and called *Furnez Breiz* (*Sagesse de Bretagne*). The Breton rimes of Brizeux became really popular and, years after, Breton minstrels would recite them as their own!

Les Bretons (1845) is his greatest work, more robust than *Marie*, fusing many idylls in an epical plan, and shows all the soul of his native province in the story of everyday lives. The poem was immediately famous, praised by Vigny and Hugo and, through their efforts, 'crowned' by the French Academy. In 1847 Brizeux started on his last journey to Italy and stayed there two years in a time of revolution and turmoil. He produced nothing more until 1855, when a book of Italian idylls, *Histoires Poétiques*, appeared. A diffuse and rather forbidding disquisition in three books on the sources of inspiration and the function of poetry, was his last work in verse. In 1858, his lungs being affected, he was ordered to the South, and was over-

taken by his last illness at Montpellier. At the public expense, his body was taken back to Brittany, and buried beside the Ellé.

Brizeux had dreamed of rehandling *la matière de Bretagne* in the old epical spirit and with the resources of modern archaeology, of reviving all the heroic and religious history of Armorica from pagan times in a vast cyclic work. A long life would hardly have sufficed; for in the latter part of his career the fastidious scruples of his artistic conscience, a mania for excessive concision, threatened to desiccate his talent, and he had lost all that generous fluidity of style which is so large a part of his charm in his happier early work. The achievement of Brizeux is, however, very memorable. No French poet had deliberately devoted gifts of a high order to the interpretation of a race. His 'local patriotism' is neither factitious nor complacent. His tone is always completely appropriate to his subject. His humble creatures have the dignity of symbols and keep their own reality. Brizeux paints in the ancient manner, broadly, and with a noble economy. He is simple without an effort, which is the only way to be simple; and his tenderness has not a false note. Unfortunately, his talent wanted energy, and he became a victim of that dissatisfaction without which there is no art, but which easily degenerates into impotence when it is not controlled by self-knowledge and a certain fixity of ideals.

Œuvres poétiques. 4 vols. (Lemerre.)

LXIV

MARIE

Du bois de Ker-Mélô jusqu'au moulin de Teir,
J'ai passé tout le jour sur le bord de la mer,
Respirant sous les pins leur odeur de résine,
Poussant devant mes pieds leur feuille lisse et fine,
Et d'instants en instants, par-dessus Saint-Michel
Lorsqu' éclatait le bruit de la barre d'Enn-Tell,
M'arrêtant pour entendre: au milieu des bruyères,
Carnac m'apparaissait avec toutes ses pierres,
Et parmi les men-hîr erraient comme autrefois
Les vieux guerriers des clans, leurs prêtres et leurs rois.
Puis, je marchais encore au hasard et sans règle.
C'est ainsi que, faisant le tour d'un champ de seigle,

Je trouvai deux enfants couchés au pied d'un houx,
Deux enfants qui jouaient, sur le sable, aux cailloux ;
Et soudain, dans mon cœur cette vie innocente,
Qu'une image bien chère à mes yeux représente,
O Maï ! si fortement s'est mise à revenir,
Qu'il m'a fallu chanter encor ce souvenir.
Dans ce sombre Paris, toi que j'ai tant rêvée,
Vois ! comme en vos vallons mon cœur t'a retrouvée !
A l'âge qui pour moi fut si plein de douceurs,
J'avais pour être aimé trois cousines (trois sœurs) ;
Elles venaient souvent me voir au presbytère ;
Le nom qu'elles portaient alors, je dois le taire :
Toutes trois aujourd'hui marchent le front voilé,
Une près de Morlaix et deux à Kemperlé ;
Mais je sais qu'en leur cloître elles me sont fidèles,
Elles ont prié Dieu pour moi qui parle d'elles.

Chez mon ancien curé, l'été, d'un lieu voisin
Elles venaient donc voir l'écolier leur cousin ;
Prenaient, en me parlant, un langage de mères ;
Ou bien, selon leur âge et le mien, moins sévères,
S'informaient de Marie, objet de mes amours,
Et si, pour l'embrasser, je la suivais toujours ;
Et comme ma rougeur montrait assez ma flamme,
Ces sœurs, qui sans pitié jouaient avec mon âme,
Curieuses aussi, résolurent de voir
Celle qui me tenait si jeune en son pouvoir.

A l'heure de midi, lorsque de leur village
Les enfants accouraient au bourg, selon l'usage,
Les voilà de s'asseoir, en riant, toutes trois,
Devant le cimetière, au dessous de la croix ;
Et quand au catéchisme arrivait une fille,
Rouge sous la chaleur et qui semblait gentille,
Comme il en venait tant de Ker-barz, Ker-halvé,
Et par tous les sentiers qui vont à Ti-névé,
Elles barraient la route, et par plaisanterie
Disaient en soulevant sa coiffe : 'Es-tu Marie ?'

Or celle-ci passait avec Joseph Daniel;
Elle entendit son nom, et vite, grâce au ciel!
Se sauvait, quand Daniel, comme une biche fauve,
La poursuivit, criant: 'Voici Maï qui se sauve!'
Et, sautant par-dessus les tombes et leurs morts,
Au détour du clocher la prit à bras-le-corps:
Elle se débattait, se cachait la figure;
Mais chacun écarta ses mains et sa coiffure;
Et les yeux des trois sœurs s'ouvrirent pour bien voir
Cette grappe du Scorf, cette fleur de blé noir.

[*Marie.*

LXV

Invocation

Il est au fond des bois, il est une peuplade
Où, loin de ce siècle malade,
Souvent je viens errer, moi, poète nomade.

Là tout m'attire et me sourit,
La sève de mon cœur s'épanche, et mon esprit
Comme un arbuste refleurit.

Sous ces bois primitifs que le vent seul ravage,
Je sens éclore, à chaque ombrage,
Un vers franc imprégné d'une senteur sauvage.

Devant mon regard enchanté,
Jeunes filles, enfants empourprés de santé,
Passent dans leur virginité.

J'aide dans les sillons le soc opiniâtre;
Pasteur, je chante avec le pâtre;
La fileuse m'endort, le soir, au coin de l'âtre.

Puis, dès l'aube, je vois les jeux
De l'oiseau qui sautille entre les pieds des bœufs,
Et près des sources pond ses œufs.

O chère solitude!—Et pourtant, je le jure,
Arts élégants, bronze, peinture,
Je vous aime, rivaux de cette âpre nature!

Hélas! me préservent les cieux
De vous nier jamais, symboles radieux,
Charmes de l'esprit et des yeux!

Et si, vivant d'oubli dans cette humble Cornouaille,
J'entends vos clameurs de bataille,
Héros et saints martyrs du monde, je tressaille!

Mais, ô calme riant des bois,
Revenez dans mon cœur, adoucissez ma voix,
Faites aimer ce que je vois.

C'est là de tous mes vers la pieuse demande:
Esprits des champs et de la lande,
Versez en moi la paix pour que je la répande!

[*Histoires Poétiques.*

JOSÉPHIN SOULARY

1815-1891

Joseph (otherwise Joséphin) Soulary came of a family which had borne in Genoa the name of Solari, but had been settled in Lyons and connected with its silk industry for several generations. His schooling was brief, for at fifteen he was rated in a marching regiment as an 'enfant de troupe.' He served till 1836, and his first verses in a provincial paper were signed 'Soulary, grenadier.' But his health broke down, and civil employment was found for him in his native city, a clerkship at the Préfecture du Rhône which he kept for thirty years and then exchanged for the post of librarian to the Art Gallery of Lyons. These occupations left him leisure for what he loved best, writing poetry. His first collection of verses appeared in 1838; it was his *Sonnets humoristiques* (1858) which made him as famous in the capital as in his native city, and won him the friendship of his great contemporaries.

Soulary's is a delicate and engaging gift. He had no rival as a sonneteer in his lifetime; and even since the appearance of M. de Heredia, the consummate lapidary, who unquestionably excels him in generosity of rhythm and in economy of material, the charm of Soulary's sonnets remains fresh and inimitable as a smile. In his supple hands the same form lent itself with equal felicity to a considerable variety of themes and moods: he is playful and pensive, allegorical or familiar, tells a dream or evokes a woman's grace or extracts the moral of an anecdote with the same effect of spontaneity and always with a sovereign elegance. Though the fascination of the sonnet form possessed him, and obviously governed his adventures into the field of structural invention, his achievements in longer lyrics and even in narrative poetry are by no means negligible. Such a piece as 'Un Songe' may fairly be called a masterpiece, for its emotional quality and vividness no less than for the perfect poise and melody of the strophes. He was least happy perhaps in the verse inspired by the events of 1870-1871: indignation seemed to stifle his natural voice; but he was capable of fine efforts of satire, as 'Le Réactionnaire' attests. He wrote one comedy, *Un grand homme qu'on attend.*

The principal volumes of Soulary's poetry published in his lifetime

are: *A travers champs* (1838), *Les Éphémères* (two series: Lyons 1846, 1857); *Sonnets humoristiques* (1858), *Rêves d'Escarpolette* (1862); *Sonnets, poèmes et poésies* (1864); *Les Diables bleus* (1870).—There is a collective edition in three volumes published by Lemerre.

LXVI

PRIMULA VERIS

Que tout cœur aimant soit aimé!
Du bonheur féconde semence,
Le désir a partout germé;
La saison des baisers commence.

La saison des baisers commence;
Pour calmer le sang enflammé
Qui fait battre l'artère immense,
Agitez le thyrse embaumé.

Agitez le thyrse embaumé
Dont l'odeur grise l'innocence;
Domptés par le sceptre charmé,
Les dieux mêmes sont en démence!

Que tout cœur aimant soit aimé!
La saison des baisers commence;
Agitez le thyrse embaumé,
Les dieux mêmes sont en démence!

Les dieux mêmes sont en démence,
L'Amour s'offre tout désarmé,
Agitez le thyrse embaumé!

Agitez le thyrse embaumé
Sur le front de l'adolescence;
La saison des baisers commence.

La saison des baisers commence;
Pour qu'il en soit beaucoup semé,
Que tout cœur aimant soit aimé!

Pour qu'il en soit beaucoup semé
Sur le front de l'adolescence
L'Amour s'offre tout désarmé.

[*Sonnets Humoristiques.*

VICTOR DE LAPRADE

1812-1883

Pierre-Marie-Victor Richard de Laprade, the son of a well-known physician, was born at Montbrison, but brought up at Lyons, and passed almost all his life there. He was nominally a barrister when he published his first poetry, *Les Parfums de Madeleine.* Four years later, in 1841, he made some stir with the long poem *Psyché*, an evangelical re-setting of the beautiful Greek allegory. After *Odes et Poèmes* (1844), which are largely inspired by the Scriptures and contain some of his finest work, Laprade was sent by the Government upon a literary mission to Italy, and on his return was appointed professor of French literature at the University of Lyons.

Poèmes évangéliques (1852) and *Symphonies* (1855) prepared the way for his election to the French Academy: in 1858 he succeeded Musset, who had said of him: 'If M. de Laprade is a poet, I am none.' *Idylles héroïques* appeared in the same year. In 1861 Laprade gave great offence to the Imperial Government by a satire on 'official' poets—*Les Muses d'État.* The newspaper in which it appeared was threatened with suspension, and the poet himself driven from his chair at Lyons. Just before the Empire fell it was offered him again by M. Émile Ollivier, and declined. *Pernette*, published in 1868, is another 'heroic idyll,' a story of the Napoleonic wars which describes the effect of foreign invasion in reconciling a disaffected peasantry to conscription: appearing on the eve of the war with Prussia, it has a certain prophetic interest. After the Peace, Laprade was elected to the Assembly as Deputy for the Rhône. He voted with the Right, but took no part in debate, and was frequently absent through ill-health. He resigned his seat in 1873 and about the same time published *Poèmes civiques*, a collection of patriotic poems which includes the well-known satire, 'Gretchen.' *Le Livre d'un Père* (1878), perhaps his most attractive book, was his last publication in verse. He had written considerably in prose also—chiefly on educational subjects. *L'Éducation homicide* (1867), and two treatises on the feeling for nature among the ancients and among the moderns, are his principal prose works.

Laprade's place in French poetry is hardly settled. With various gifts, he is essentially a moralist. Grave, eloquent, sonorous at its best, his verse does not always give an impression of spontaneity; and he is voluminous and singularly unequal, like Wordsworth, with whom he has a certain affinity, not in style nor in positive beliefs, but in his general attitude towards the inanimate. Nature supplied him inexhaustibly with emblems of moral virtue, and appears in his characteristic poetry as the great consoler, the monitress and the wise nurse of human efforts. He strove, with moderate success perhaps, to reconcile a certain pantheism with a severe type of liberal catholicism. His satire is heavy but not ineffective. Accidentally associated with *Le Parnasse*, though he had little enough in common with its leaders, Laprade always avoided the Romantic exaggeration of personality; but he professed himself a disciple of Lamartine, and shared his master's aversion for literary poetry. He has Lamartine's negative quality of imprecision: he is more laborious and more correct. That he wants the wings and the infinite capacity for melody needs no saying.

The Poetical Works of Laprade are in Lemerre's Collection (six volumes).

LXVII

La Mort d'un Chêne

i

Quand l'homme te frappa de sa lâche cognée,
O roi qu'hier le mont portait avec orgueil,
Mon âme, au premier coup, retentit indignée,
Et dans la forêt sainte il se fit un grand deuil.

Un murmure éclata sous ses ombres paisibles;
J'entendis des sanglots et des bruits menaçants:
Je vis errer des bois les hôtes invisibles,
Pour te défendre, hélas! contre l'homme impuissants.

Tout un peuple effrayé partit de ton feuillage,
Et mille oiseaux chanteurs, troublés dans leurs amours,
Planèrent sur ton front comme un pâle nuage,
Perçant de cris aigus tes gémissements sourds.

Le flot triste hésita dans l'urne des fontaines,
Le haut du mont trembla sous les pins chancelants,
Et l'aquilon roula dans les gorges lointaines
L'écho des grands soupirs arrachés à tes flancs.

Ta chute laboura, comme un coup de tonnerre,
Un arpent tout entier sur le sol paternel;
Et quand son sein meurtri reçut ton corps, la terre
Eut un rugissement terrible et solennel:

Car Cybèle t'aimait, toi l'aîné de ses chênes,
Comme un premier enfant que sa mère a nourri;
Du plus pur de sa sève elle abreuvait tes veines,
Et son front se levait pour te faire un abri.

Elle entoura tes pieds d'un long tapis de mousse,
Où toujours en avril elle faisait germer
Pervenche et violette à l'odeur fraîche et douce,
Pour qu'on choisît ton ombre et qu'on y vînt aimer.

Toi, sur elle épanchant cette ombre et tes murmures,
Oh! tu lui payais bien ton tribut filial!
Et chaque automne à flots versait tes feuilles mûres,
Comme un manteau d'hiver, sur le coteau natal.

La terre s'enivrait de ta large harmonie;
Pour parler dans la brise, elle a créé les bois:
Quand elle veut gémir d'une plainte infinie,
Des chênes et des pins elle emprunte la voix.

Cybèle t'amenait une immense famille;
Chaque branche portait son nid ou son essaim;
Abeille, oiseau, reptile, insecte qui fourmille,
Tous avaient la pâture et l'abri dans ton sein.

Ta chute a dispersé tout ce peuple sonore;
Mille êtres avec toi tombent anéantis;
A ta place, dans l'air, seuls voltigent encore
Quelques pauvres oiseaux qui cherchent leurs petits.

Tes rameaux ont broyé des troncs déjà robustes ;
Autour de toi la mort a fauché largement.
Tu gis sur un monceau de chênes et d'arbustes ;
J'ai vu tes verts cheveux pâlir en un moment.

Et ton éternité pourtant me semblait sûre !
La terre te gardait des jours multipliés . . .
La sève afflue encor par l'horrible blessure
Qui dessécha le tronc séparé de ses pieds.

Oh ! ne prodigue plus la sève à ces racines,
Ne verse pas ton sang sur ce fils expiré,
Mère ! garde-le tout pour les plantes voisines ;
Le chêne ne boit plus ce breuvage sacré.

Dis adieu, pauvre chêne, au printemps qui t'enivre :
Hier, il t'a paré de feuillages nouveaux ;
Tu ne sentiras plus ce bonheur de revivre :
Adieu, les nids d'amour qui peuplaient tes rameaux !

Adieu, les noirs essaims bourdonnant sur tes branches,
Le frisson de la feuille aux caresses du vent,
Adieu, les frais tapis de mousse et de pervenches
Où le bruit des baisers t'a réjoui souvent !

O chêne ! je comprends ta puissante agonie !
Dans sa paix, dans sa force, il est dur de mourir ;
A voir crouler ta tête au printemps rajeunie,
Je devine, ô géant ! ce que tu dois souffrir.

Ainsi jusqu'à ses pieds l'homme t'a fait descendre ;
Son fer a dépecé les rameaux et le tronc ;
Cet être harmonieux sera fumée et cendre
Et la terre et le vent se le partageront !

Mais n'est-il rien de toi qui subsiste et qui dure ?
Où s'en vont ces esprits d'écorce recouverts ?
Et n'est-il de vivant que l'immense nature,
Une au fond, mais s'ornant de mille aspects divers ?

Quel qu'il soit, cependant, ma voix bénit ton être
Pour le divin repos qu'à tes pieds j'ai goûté.
Dans un jeune univers, si tu dois y renaître,
Puisses-tu retrouver la force et la beauté!

Car j'ai pour les forêts des amours fraternelles;
Poète vêtu d'ombre, et dans la paix rêvant,
Je vis avec lenteur, triste et calme, et, comme elles,
Je porte haut ma tête, et chante au moindre vent.

Je crois le bien au fond de tout ce que j'ignore;
J'espère malgré tout, mais nul bonheur humain:
Comme un chêne immobile, en mon repos sonore,
J'attends le jour de Dieu qui nous luira demain.

En moi de la forêt le calme s'insinue;
De ses arbres sacrés, dans l'ombre enseveli,
J'apprends la patience aux hommes inconnue,
Et mon cœur apaisé vit d'espoir et d'oubli.

Mais l'homme fait la guerre aux forêts pacifiques;
L'ombrage sur les monts recule chaque jour;
Rien ne nous restera des asiles mystiques
Où l'âme va cueillir la pensée et l'amour.

Prends ton vol, ô mon cœur! la terre n'a plus d'ombres,
Et les oiseaux du ciel, les rêves infinis,
Les blanches visions qui cherchent les lieux sombres,
Bientôt n'auront plus d'arbre où déposer leurs nids.

La terre se dépouille et perd ses sanctuaires;
On chasse des vallons ses hôtes merveilleux.
Les dieux aimaient des bois les temples séculaires;
La hache a fait tomber les chênes et les dieux.

Plus d'autels, plus d'ombrage et de paix abritée,
Plus de rites sacrés sous les grands dômes verts!
Nous léguons à nos fils la terre dévastée;
Car nos pères nous ont légué des cieux déserts.

ii

Ainsi tu gémissais, poète, ami des chênes,
Toi qui gardes encor le culte des vieux jours.
Tu vois l'homme altéré sans ombre et sans fontaines ;
Va ! l'antique Cybèle enfantera toujours !

Lève-toi ! c'est assez pleurer sur ce qui tombe ;
La lyre doit savoir prédire et consoler ;
Quand l'esprit te conduit sur le bord de la tombe,
De vie et d'avenir c'est pour nous y parler.

Crains-tu de voir tarir la sève universelle,
Parce qu'un chêne est mort et qu'il était géant ?
O poète ! âme ardente en qui l'amour ruisselle,
Organe de la vie, as-tu peur du néant ?

Va ! l'œil qui nous réchauffe a plus d'un jour à luire ;
Le grand semeur a bien des graines à semer,
La nature n'est pas lasse encor de produire :
Car, ton cœur le sait bien, Dieu n'est pas las d'aimer.

Tandis que tu gémis sur cet arbre en ruines,
Mille germes là-bas, déposés en secret,
Sous le regard de Dieu, veillent dans ces collines,
Tout prêts à s'élancer en vivante forêt.

Nos fils pourront aimer et rêver sous leurs dômes ;
Le poète adorer la nature et chanter !
Dans l'ombreux labyrinthe où tu vois des fantômes,
Un idéal plus pur viendra les visiter.

Croissez sur nos débris, croissez, forêts nouvelles !
Sur vos jeunes bourgeons nous verserons nos pleurs ;
D'avance je vous vois, plus fortes et plus belles,
Faire un plus doux ombrage à des hôtes meilleurs.

Vous n'abriterez plus de sanglants sacrifices ;
L'âge emporte les dieux ennemis de la paix,
Aux chants, aux jeux sacrés, vos séjours sont propices ;
Votre mousse aux loisirs offre des lits épais.

Ne penche plus ton front sur les choses qui meurent;
Tourne au levant tes yeux, ton cœur à l'avenir.
Les arbres sont tombés, mais les germes demeurent;
Tends sur ceux qui naîtront tes bras pour les bénir.

Poète aux longs regards, vois les races futures,
Vois ces bois merveilleux à l'horizon éclos;
Dans ton sein prophétique écoute les murmures;
Écoute! au lieu d'un bruit de fer et de sanglots,

Sur des coteaux baignés par des clartés sereines
Où des peuples joyeux semblent se reposer,
Sous les chênes émus, les hêtres et les frênes,
On dirait qu'on entend un immense baiser.

[*Odes et Poèmes.*

THÉODORE DE BANVILLE

1823-1891

BANVILLE was the son of a naval officer and was born at Moulins, but became a Parisian very early. His life (of which his writings tell us next to nothing) was tranquil and happy. He had frail health, domestic virtues, endeared himself to the best of his contemporaries; and he was a man of real piety, and (to complete his figure) a famous epicure.

Les Cariatides, his first volume of poetry, dates from 1842. The great poets of the first Romantic generation were revising their formulas and enlarging their horizon. The poetry of archangelical rebellion and distinguished melancholy had spent itself: there had been a surfeit of unchastened personalities; the day was past for Gothicism and Orientalism, the exotic vogue of northern mists and Mediterranean moons. Banville made his first athletic essays and earned Baudelaire's comparison with the infant Hercules at a moment of transition. The poetry which should shake thrones and foresee millenniums, or carry the conquests of the historical spirit into the domain of the imagination and fix in marmorean forms the transience of our illusions, was as yet hardly promised. Banville had no 'mission,' not even an attitude, only a tone; but with a gay and yet austere devotion to the art of making verse he conceived the possibility of carrying the development of a magnificent instrument one step farther. Upon the recent claim for freedom his precocious virtuosity superimposed a classical worship of correctness: in his hands the reforms which had seemed audacious a few years back passed into the stage of dogma. This is his only link with the Parnassians: for it was by the fortune of an even temper and without any pretension to the tranquillity of science that he showed himself truly impassive, serene as the ancient gods whose train, said Gautier, he brought back into the Romantic *Burg*.

Banville's is a poetry of fantastic and delicious variations. It is not true that he is insensible; but for the power to sustain himself he depends singularly little upon what is outside the actual material he worked with. The patriotic desire to hearten the defence of Paris made him think of writing *Idylles prussiennes*: the inspiration of the book, from strophe to strophe, is purely verbal. Still more evidently verbal is the inspiration of the quite delightful *Odes Funambulesques*, which their esoteric and modish allusions make it

less easy for us to appreciate to-day: their atticism, their comic elegance resides entirely in the rimes.

The all-sufficiency of Rime, the brilliant paradox he maintained in his petulant and incomplete but valuable *Traité*, was after all only a violent assertion of that pre-established and miraculous accord between sense and sound in which every poet must necessarily confide; and if with Banville 'the imagination of the ear' was in some degree an idiosyncrasy, there are many pages in the same short work which sufficiently dispose of the view that his conception of his art left the spiritual elements out of account.

Once his limitations are recognised, Banville's achievement appears considerable — even in point of variety, for his comedies (*Ésope*, *Gringoire*) have a singular grace, and it is in them perhaps that a certain affinity with La Fontaine's temperament best appears. It is a real merit of Banville's to have appreciated the fabulist, as a poet, better than any one else in the century. Another, not a great one, is the example he set in reviving the 'fixed forms' of an earlier poetry; and yet another that, for all the amusing intolerance and assumed finality of his technical theories, he really foresaw the necessity of farther reforms tending to make the modern ear the sole arbiter of poetical practice.

In a word, the form of verse interested him profoundly: a really scrupulous craftsmanship is not so common; and the name of poet can be denied to Théodore de Banville only when the word has lost a good half of its associations.

The principal volumes of Banville's poetry are:—*Les Cariatides* (1842); *Les Stalactites* (1846); *Odelettes* (1856); *Odes Funambulesques* (1857, 1869); *Les Exilés* (1866); *Idylles prussiennes* (1871); *Princesses* (1874); *Trente-six Ballades joyeuses* (1875); *Nous Tous* (1884); *Sonnailles et Clochettes* (1890); *Dans la Fournaise* (1892). His *Petit Traité de Poésie française* appeared in 1872. The works of Banville are published by Lemerre and by Charpentier.

LXVIII

Sous Bois

A travers le bois fauve et radieux,
Récitant des vers sans qu'on les en prie,
Vont, couverts de pourpre et l'orfèvrerie,
Les Comédiens, rois et demi-dieux.

Hérode brandit son glaive odieux ;
Dans les oripeaux de la broderie,
Cléopâtre brille en jupe fleurie
Comme resplendit un paon couvert d'yeux.

Puis, tout flamboyants sous les chrysolithes,
Les bruns Adonis et les Hyppolytes
Montrent leurs arcs d'or et leurs peaux de loups.

Pierrot s'est chargé de la dame-jeanne.
Puis après eux tous, d'un air triste et doux
Viennent en rêvant le Poète et l'Ane.

[*Les Cariatides.*

26 *janvier* 1842.

LXIX

Nous n'irons plus au bois, les lauriers sont coupés.
Les Amours aux bassins, les Naïades en groupe
Voient reluire au soleil en cristaux découpés
Les flots silencieux qui coulaient de leur coupe.
Les lauriers sont coupés, et le cerf aux abois
Tressaille au son du cor ; nous n'irons plus au bois.
Où des enfants joueurs riait la folle troupe
Parmi les lys d'argent aux pleurs du ciel trempés,
Voici l'herbe qu'on fauche et les lauriers qu'on coupe.
Nous n'irons plus au bois, les lauriers sont coupés.

[*Les Stalactites.*

Novembre 1845.

LXX

Ballade de Victor Hugo,

Père de tous les Rimeurs

En ce temps dédaigneux, la Rime
A force amants et chevaliers.
Ces chanteurs, pour qu'on les imprime,
Accourent chez nos hôteliers

De Voyron, pays des toiliers,
D'Auch, de Nuits, de Gap et de Lille,
Et nous en avons par milliers,
Mais le père est là-bas, dans l'île.

Les uns devant le mont sublime
Bâtissent de grands escaliers
Qui vont jusqu'à la double cime;
Ceux-là, comme des oiseliers,
Prennent des rhythmes singuliers,
Ou rejoignent l'abbé Delille
Par le chemin des écoliers;
Mais le père est là-bas, dans l'île.

D'autres encor tiennent la lime;
D'autres, s'adossant aux piliers,
Heurtent la sottise unanime
De leurs fronts, comme des béliers:
D'autres, effrayant les geôliers
Du grand cri de Rouget de l'Isle,
Brisent nos fers et nos colliers;
Mais le père est là-bas, dans l'île.

Envoi

Gautier parmi ces joailliers
Est prince, et Leconte de Lisle
Forge l'or dans ses ateliers;
Mais le père est là-bas, dans l'île.

[*Trente-six Ballades joyeuses.*

Août 1869.

LXXI

La Montagne

Pantoum

Sur les bords de ce flot céleste
Mille oiseaux chantent, querelleurs.
Mon enfant, seul bien qui me reste,
Dors sous ces branches d'arbre en fleurs.

Mille oiseaux chantent, querelleurs ;
Sur la rivière un cygne glisse.
Dors sous ces branches d'arbre en fleurs,
O toi ma joie et mon délice !

Sur la rivière un cygne glisse
Dans les feux du soleil couchant.
O toi ma joie et mon délice,
Endors-toi, bercé par mon chant !

Dans les feux du soleil couchant
Le vieux mont est brillant de neige.
Endors-toi, bercé par mon chant,
Qu'un dieu bienveillant te protège !

Le vieux mont est brillant de neige,
A ses pieds l'ébénier fleurit.
Qu'un dieu bienveillant te protège !
Ta petite bouche sourit.

A ses pieds l'ébénier fleurit,
De brillants métaux le recouvrent.
Ta petite bouche sourit,
Pareille aux corolles qui s'ouvrent.

De brillants métaux le recouvrent,
Je vois luire des diamants.
Pareille aux corolles qui s'ouvrent,
Ta lèvre a des rayons charmants.

Je vois luire des diamants
Sur la montagne enchanteresse.
Ta lèvre a des rayons charmants :
Dors, qu'un rêve heureux te caresse !

Sur la montagne enchanteresse
Je vois des topazes de feu.
Dors, qu'un songe heureux te caresse,
Ferme tes yeux de lotus bleu !

Je vois des topazes de feu
Qui chassent tout songe funeste.
Ferme tes yeux de lotus bleu
Sur les bords de ce flot céleste!

[*Petit Traité de Poésie française.*

LXXII

Mourir, Dormir

Il boîte affreusement, ce vieux cheval de fiacre.
Ses yeux tout grands ouverts ont des blancheurs de nacre.
Il voudrait se coucher, dormir; il ne peut pas.
Sur le pavé glissant il bute à chaque pas.
Il ressemble à ces morts qu'on traîne sur des claies;
Ses jambes et ses flancs sont tout couverts de plaies;
Sa bouche molle et noire est gonflée en dedans.
Tragique, il mord le vide avec ses longues dents,
Tandis que le cocher l'injurie et le fouaille,
Et chaque fois déchire une nouvelle entaille,
Gros homme rouge, avec des gaîtés de noceur.
En quelque horrible songe il voit l'équarrisseur;
Alors, comme il trébuche, accablé par ce rêve,
Bien vite, à coups de fouet son bourreau le relève.
Allons, hue! Eh! va donc, carcan! va donc, chahut!
Eh! va donc, président, carcasse! Gamahut!
Sur le cheval, en proie aux angoisses dernières,
Le fouet, ivre et féroce, enlève des lanières.
Ce pauvre être perclus, battu, martyrisé,
Que tourmente un rayon de soleil irisé,
Cet affamé qui n'a pas eu d'avoine, en somme
N'est qu'une rosse. Il est malheureux comme un homme.

[*Dans la Fournaise.*

Mercredi, 12 *janvier* 1887.

LOUIS BOUILHET

1822-1869

Bouilhet was born at Cany in Normandy; and as his father, an army surgeon, died young of wounds received in the Russian campaign, he was brought up by his mother's father—an ancient gentleman who had corresponded with the *philosophes*—and met his lifelong friend Gustave Flaubert at school in Rouen. He began riming as a schoolboy, and afterwards, between walking the hospitals and coaching pupils for a living, found time to perfect his talent. He gave up medicine in 1845 and thenceforward devoted his life to poetry. A volume of lyrics, followed by the Roman tale in verse called *Mélœnis*, and *Les Fossiles*, a sort of scientific epic, made him known to a few: but as a dramatic poet he quickly won a considerable reputation: his first play, *Madame de Montarcy*, was put on the stage in 1856, and seemed for the moment about to restore the popularity of the Romantic formulas. Its successors (all written in verse except one of the best, *Faustine*) were produced with various success: he published nothing more except dramas, but he wrote a good deal of other verse, which appeared posthumously under the title *Dernières Chansons*. His disinterested and laborious career ended prematurely, just when his appointment to the charge of the public library at Rouen had brought him material independence.

Bouilhet might be called a transitional Romantic. All his writings reflect a vigorous and naturally expansive temperament: his dramatic conceptions have more breadth and intensity than delicacy; there is everywhere a profusion of images, of colour; he loved the poets of the Renaissance and perhaps knew them better than any of his contemporaries. On the other hand the severe repression of his personality, the extreme conscientiousness of his form, his erudition (he spent much of his time studying the Chinese language and civilisation with the idea of writing a novel on the Far East), a strain of Pagan pessimism running through his poetry, seem rather to attach him to the school of Leconte de Lisle. All his verse is of admirable workmanship.

All Bouilhet's dramas and *Les Fossiles* are now somewhat difficult

to obtain. *Festons et Astragales*, *Melœnis* and *Dernières Chansons*, with Flaubert's memorable Preface, have recently been reprinted by Lemerre.

LXXIII

La Colombe

Quand, chassés sans retour des temples vénérables,
Tordus au vent de feu qui soufflait du Thabor,
Les grands Olympiens étaient si misérables
Que les petits enfants tiraient leur barbe d'or;

Durant ces jours d'angoisse où la terre étonnée
Portait, comme un fardeau, l'écroulement des cieux,
Un seul homme, debout contre la destinée,
Osa, dans leur détresse, avoir pitié des dieux.

C'était un large front,—un Empereur,—un sage,
Assez haut sur son trône et sur sa volonté
Pour arrêter du doigt tout un siècle au passage,
Et donner son mot d'ordre à la Divinité.

Or, un soir qu'il marchait avec ses capitaines,
Incliné sous ce poids de l'avenir humain,
Il aperçut, au fond des brumes incertaines,
Un vieux temple isolé, sur le bord d'un chemin ;

Un vieux temple isolé, plein de mornes visages,
Un de ces noirs débris, au souvenir amer,
Qui dorment échoués sur la grève des âges,
Quand les religions baissent comme la mer.

Le seuil croulait; la pluie avait rongé la porte ;
Toute la lune entrait par les tois crevassés.
Au milieu de la route, il quitta son escorte,
Et s'avança, pensif, au long des murs glacés.

Les colonnes de marbre, à ses pieds, abattues,
Touchaient de toutes parts les pavés précieux ;
L'herbe haute montait au ventre des statues,
Des cigognes rêvaient sur l'épaule des dieux.

Parfois, dans le silence, éclatait un bruit d'aile,
On entendait, au loin, comme un frisson courir ;
Et sur les grands vaincus penchant un front fidèle,
Phœbé, froide comme eux, les regardait mourir.

Et comme il restait là, perdu dans ses pensées,
Des profondeurs du temple il vit se détacher,
Avec un bruit confus de plaintes cadencées,
Une lueur tremblante et qui semblait marcher.

Cela se rapprochait et sonnait sur les dalles.
C'était un grand vieillard qui pleurait en chemin,
Courbé, maigre, en haillons, et traînant ses sandales,
Une tiare au front, une lampe à la main.

Il cachait sous sa robe une blanche colombe ;
Dernier prêtre des dieux, il apportait encor
Sur le dernier autel la dernière hécatombe . . .
Et l'Empereur pleura,—car son rêve était mort !

Il pleura jusqu'au jour sous cette voûte noire.
Tu souriais, ô Christ, dans ton paradis bleu,
Tes chérubins chantaient sur des harpes d'ivoire,
Tes anges secouaient leurs six ailes de feu !

Et du morne Empyrée insultant la détresse,
Comme au bord d'un grand lac aux flots étincelants,
Dans le lait lumineux perdu par la Déesse,
Tes martyrs couronnés lavaient leurs pieds sanglants !

Tu régnais, sans partage, au ciel et sur la terre :
Ta croix couvrait le monde et montait au milieu ;
Tout, devant ton regard, tremblait,—jusqu'à ta mère,
Pâle éternellement d'avoir porté son Dieu.

Mais tu ne savais pas le mot des destinées,
O toi qui triomphais, près de l'Olympe mort ;
Vois : c'est le même gouffre . . , avant deux mille années,
Ton ciel y descendra,—sans le combler encor !

Tu connaîtras aussi, ployé sous l'anathème,
La désaffection des peuples et des rois,
Si pauvre et si perdu que tu n'auras plus même,
Pour t'y coucher en paix, la largeur de ta croix !

Ton dernier temple, ô Christ, est froid comme une tombe;
Ta porte n'ouvre plus sur le vaste Avenir ;
Voilà que le jour baisse et qu'on entend venir
Le vieux prêtre courbé qui porte une colombe !

[*Dernières Chansons.*

LECONTE DE LISLE

1818-1894

Charles-Marie-René Leconte de Lisle was born at Saint-Paul in the French island of Réunion, of mixed Breton and Gascon parentage: his mother was a niece of Parny, the elegant and frivolously tender poet of Lewis the Sixteenth's reign. He was brought up partly in the colony and partly in Brittany, and after leaving school spent some time in travel, being intended for a commercial career, and visited India and Madagascar to the incalculable advantage of a late-blossoming talent. It was only in 1847 that, abandoning all idea of an active occupation, he settled in Paris and lived there 'on privations and Greek roots,' acquiring the science of verse and teaching and studying ancient languages and civilisations. In 1848 his ardent Republicanism threatened to sweep him into politics, but he remained faithful to letters, and between that year and 1852 contributed to periodicals a certain number of poems which formed the nucleus of his first volume. The moment was unfavourable to a work so completely detached from the national anxieties, and Leconte's dazzling and scrupulous presentment of Greek and Oriental mythologies in *Poèmes Antiques* drew scanty attention—less perhaps than its violent preface (withdrawn from later editions), which traversed the development of Western poetry for two thousand years and incautiously asserted, in effect, that almost all the poets since Sophocles, preoccupied with the expression of their own judgments, passions or misfortunes, had pursued a false ideal. *Poèmes et Poésies* appeared in 1854; and in 1859 *La Revue de Paris* produced the poet's curious *Passion*, a sequence intended to form the 'legend' of an artist friend's Stations of the Cross: its austere beauties reflect a conscientious effort to assimilate a Catholic fervour notoriously antipathetic to his mind. The principal elements of *Poèmes Barbares* (1862) serve the wider purpose of reconstructing with an erudite neutrality the forms in which humanity has affirmed from age to age and from clime to clime its inexhaustible capacity for illusion. This volume did not pass unappreciated; and already a group of younger writers, disposed to prize virtuosity above emotion, to envy the serenity of

science and its contempt for the individual, had begun to look to Leconte de Lisle to give a new direction to French poetry. A poetical anthology called *Le Parnasse Contemporain*, due to the initiative of Xavier de Ricard, revealed the forces of this new movement and, though containing examples of such independent talents as those of Gautier and Baudelaire, as well as of old Romantics like the Deschamps and new Romantics like Banville, was in the main a homage to the ideal of objective, learned and flawless verse upheld with incomparable authority by Leconte de Lisle. Modest, austere and laborious as was his life, he became towards the end of the second Empire a militant personality, one of the torchbearers—along with Flaubert and Renan—of the French intellectual tradition and, in the absence of Victor Hugo, by far the most illustrious maker of French verse. In 1861 appeared the first of Leconte's translations of the greatest Greek and Latin poets into French prose. Homer followed Theocritus and the Anacreontica; then came Hesiod and the Orphic Hymns; then Aeschylus, Horace, Sophocles and Euripides—the last appearing in 1885. These translations have a rare distinction and teem with happy discoveries of language. They do not completely satisfy critical scholarship; they have, as has been said of Landor's prose, 'the beauty of death'; and through a curiously perverse scruple of exactness they are blotted (as indeed are too many of his poems) with the pedantry of ancient names quite literally transcribed. But the whole series constitutes an impressive monument of noble sympathy and strenuous labour and enthusiastic abnegation.

In the events of the Terrible Year Leconte de Lisle took the part of a patriot and of an uncompromising Republican. In 1871 he issued a short *Catéchisme populaire républicain* which caused some scandal in the Assembly. He had struggled with poverty during his best years; a small government pension had been granted him in 1870; and in 1872 the Republic rewarded his zeal with the post of sub-librarian to the Senate, which gave him a modest independence. Between this date and his death, he wrote two lyrical dramas—*Les Érinnyes*, founded on the *Agamemnon* and the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus, which was produced with Massenet's music in 1873 and warmly received, and *L'Apollonide* (1888), a similar attempt to reconstruct the story of the *Ion*. Another volume, *Poèmes Tragiques*, followed *Poèmes Antiques* and *Poèmes Barbares* in 1884; it was in no way inferior to them. Leconte de Lisle succeeded Victor Hugo

at the Academy; and in his last tranquil years he exercised a discreet but real sovereignty over literary Paris, and even after the advent of the Symbolists his rooms in the Luxembourg were as a shrine and a place of pilgrimage for many a neophyte of French poetry.

Leconte was in the van of the mid-century reaction against the purely subjective and the missionary elements of Romanticism. His followers gloried in a stoical or impassive attitude; and from his works the record of intimate joys and sorrows, the strain of argument and prophecy, confidences and ejaculations, were conscientiously eliminated. His poetry nevertheless is not poor in emotion. If he could not always repress a somewhat ferocious hostility to the faith of his fathers—which, for example, disfigures his presentment of the Middle Ages—this was no doubt, from the standpoint of his austere theory of art, a weakness. But, apart from passages in which his literary paganism reinforcing the anti-clerical rancour of his time found passionate expression, emotions of a more general order and therefore consistent with the conditions he imposed upon himself, emanate from the characteristic motives of his greater poems. From that eternal source of noble song, our mortality and the indifference of inanimate nature, he derived the particular melancholy which resides in the effort to recover the sense of ruined civilisations. His poetry is almost a procession of the august, persuasive or hideous shapes with which in diverse climes and ages men have clothed the indomitable desire to worship; and his special pathos feeds upon the transience of ideals.

He has been called an epic poet; but even if he had possessed the genius of narrative and his pictures were moving rather than successive, the epic spirit is incompatible with an inspiration which depends so constantly as his upon learning. Leconte de Lisle could never be a popular poet, but he is a representative poet of a time in which the noblest minds were most busy with the restoration of the past and it seemed essential that art should profit by the progress of historical studies. But his erudition never obscured his vision: few poets have been more completely concrete in expression or possessed a more generous gift of colour.

As a maker of verse, Leconte de Lisle stood at the head of a school which proposed to chasten the exuberance of the preceding generation, and which did indeed raise the level of technical accomplishment considerably. Serenity and amplitude, rather than

variety, of movement; exactitude of diction and of rime; sonority and a complete mastery of the rhythmical resources which Romanticism had added to the Alexandrine, distinguish all his writing. Occasionally, indeed, he overstepped the bounds which Hugo (whom he ever loyally owned for his master) had respected in the matter of the 'median *caesura*'; but his practice was ordinarily sober, with some indication of a classical retrogression;—and he rarely used the other lyrical measures which his immediate predecessors had so freely explored.

The works of Leconte de Lisle are published by Lemerre. His original poetry (with some critical prose) is contained in the four volumes *Poèmes Antiques*, *Poèmes Barbares*, *Poèmes Tragiques*, *Derniers Poèmes*.

LXXIV

Les Hurleurs

Le soleil dans les flots avait noyé ses flammes,
La ville s'endormait aux pieds des monts brumeux.
Sur de grand rocs lavés d'un nuage écumeux
La mer sombre en grondant versait ses hautes lames.

La nuit multipliait ce long gémissement.
Nul astre ne luisait dans l'immensité nue;
Seule, la lune pâle, en écartant la nue,
Comme une morne lampe oscillait tristement.

Monde muet, marqué d'un signe de colère,
Débris d'un globe mort au hasard dispersé,
Elle laissait tomber de son orbe glacé
Un reflet sépulcral sur l'océan polaire.

Sans borne, assise au Nord, sous les cieux étouffants,
L'Afrique, s'abritant d'ombre épaisse et de brume,
Affamait ses lions dans le sable qui fume,
Et couchait près des lacs ses troupeaux d'éléphants.

Mais sur la plage aride, aux odeurs insalubres,
Parmi les ossements de bœufs et de chevaux,
De maigres chiens, épars, allongeant leurs museaux,
Se lamentaient, poussant des hurlements lugubres.

La queue en cercle sous leurs ventres palpitants,
L'œil dilaté, tremblant sur leurs pattes fébriles,
Accroupis çà et là, tous hurlaient, immobiles,
Et d'un frisson rapide agités par instants.

L'écume de la mer collait sur leurs échines
De longs poils qui laissaient les vertèbres saillir ;
Et quand les flots par bonds les venaient assaillir,
Leurs dents blanches claquaient sous leurs rouges babines.

Devant la lune errante aux livides clartés,
Quelle angoisse inconnue, au bord des noires ondes,
Faisait pleurer une âme en vos formes immondes ?
Pourquoi gémissiez-vous, spectres épouvantés ?

Je ne sais ; mais, ô chiens qui hurliez sur les plages,
Après tant de soleils qui ne reviendront plus,
J'entends toujours, du fond de mon passé confus,
Le cri désespéré de vos douleurs sauvages !

[*Poèmes Barbares.*

LXXV

Les Montreurs

Tel qu'un morne animal, meurtri, plein de poussière,
La chaîne au cou, hurlant au chaud soleil d'été,
Promène qui voudra son cœur ensanglanté
Sur ton pavé cynique, ô plèbe carnassière !

Pour mettre un feu stérile en ton œil hébété,
Pour mendier ton rire ou ta pitié grossière,
Déchire qui voudra la robe de lumière
De la pudeur divine et de la volupté.

Dans mon orgueil muet, dans ma tombe sans gloire,
Dussé-je m'engloutir pour l'éternité noire,
Je ne te vendrai pas mon ivresse ou mon mal,

Je ne livrerai pas ma vie à tes huées,
Je ne danserai pas sur ton tréteau banal
Avec tes histrions et tes prostituées.

[*Poèmes Barbares.*

LXXVI

La Chute des Étoiles

Tombez, ô perles dénouées,
Pâles étoiles, dans la mer.
Un brouillard de roses nuées
Émerge de l'horizon clair;
A l'Orient plein d'étincelles
Le vent joyeux bat de ses ailes
L'onde qui brode un vif éclair.
Tombez, ô perles immortelles,
Pâles étoiles, dans la mer.

Plongez sous les écumes fraîches
De l'Océan mystérieux.
La lumière crible de flèches
Le faîte des monts radieux;
Mille et mille cris, par fusées,
Sortent des bois lourds de rosées;
Une musique vole aux cieux.
Plongez, de larmes arrosées,
Dans l'Océan mystérieux.

Fuyez, astres mélancoliques,
O Paradis lointains encor!
L'aurore aux lèvres métalliques
Rit dans le ciel et prend l'essor;
Elle se vêt de molles flammes
Et sur l'émeraude des lames
Fait pétiller ses gouttes d'or.
Fuyez, mondes où vont les âmes,
O Paradis lointains encor!

Allez, étoiles, aux nuits douces,
Aux cieux muets de l'Occident.
Sur les feuillages et les mousses
Le soleil darde un œil ardent;

Les cerfs, par bonds, dans les vallées,
Se baignent aux sources troublées ;
Le bruit des hommes va grondant.
Allez, ô blanches exilées,
Aux cieux muets de l'Occident.

Heureux qui vous suit, clartés mornes,
O lampes qui versez l'oubli !
Comme vous, dans l'ombre sans bornes,
Heureux qui roule enseveli !
Celui-là vers la paix s'élance :
Haine, amour, larmes, violence,
Ce qui fut l'homme est aboli.
Donnez-vous l'éternel silence,
O lampes qui versez l'oubli !

[*Poèmes Barbares.*

LXXVII

Les Plaintes du Cyclope

Certes, il n'aimait pas à la façon des hommes,
Avec des tresses d'or, des roses ou des pommes,
Depuis que t'ayant vue, ô fille de la mer,
Le désir le mordit au cœur d'un trait amer.
Il t'aimait, Galatée, avec des fureurs vraies,
Laissant le lait s'aigrir et sécher dans les claies,
Oubliant les brebis laineuses aux prés verts,
Et se souciant peu de l'immense univers.
Sans trêve ni repos, sur les algues des rives,
Il consumait sa vie en des plaintes naïves,
Interrogeait des flots les volutes d'azur,
Et suppliait la Nymphe au cœur frivole et dur,
Tandis que sur sa tête, à tout vent exposée,
Le jour versait sa flamme et la nuit sa rosée,
Et qu'énorme, couché sur un roc écarté,
Il disait de son mal la cuisante âcreté :

—Plus vive que la chèvre ou la fière génisse,
Plus blanche que le lait qui caille dans l'éclisse,
O Galatée, ô toi dont la joue et le sein
Sont fermes et luisants comme le vert raisin!
Si je viens à dormir aux cimes de ces roches,
A la pointe du pied, furtive, tu m'approches;
Mais, sitôt que mon œil s'entr'ouvre, en quelques bonds,
Tu m'échappes, cruelle, et fuis aux flots profonds!
Hélas! je sais pourquoi tu ris de ma prière:
Je n'ai qu'un seul sourcil sur ma large paupière,
Je suis noir et velu comme un ours des forêts,
Et plus haut que les pins! Mais, tel que je parais,
J'ai des brebis par mille, et je les trais moi-même;
En automne, en été, je bois leur belle crème;
Et leur laine moelleuse, en flocons chauds et doux,
Me revêt, tout l'hiver, de l'épaule aux genoux!
Je sais jouer encore, ô Pomme bien-aimée,
De la claire syrinx, par mon souffle animée:
Nul Cyclope, habitant l'Ile aux riches moissons,
N'a tenté jusqu'ici d'en égaler les sons.
Veux-tu m'entendre, ô Nymphe, en ma grotte prochaine?
Viens, laisse-toi charmer, et renonce à ta haine:
Viens! je nourris pour toi, depuis bientôt neuf jours,
Onze chevreaux tout blancs et quatre petits ours!
J'ai des lauriers en fleur avec des cyprès grêles,
Une vigne, une eau vive et des figures nouvelles;
Tout cela t'appartient, si tu ne me fuis plus!
Et si j'ai le visage et les bras trop velus,
Eh bien! je plongerai tout mon corps dans la flamme;
Je brûlerai mon œil qui m'est cher, et mon âme!

Si je savais nager, du moins! Au sein des flots
J'irais t'offrir des lis et de rouges pavots.
Mais, vains souhaits! J'en veux à ma mère; c'est elle
Qui, me voyant en proie à cette amour mortelle,
D'un récit éloquent n'a pas su te toucher.
Vos cœurs à toutes deux sont durs comme un rocher!

Cyclope, que fais-tu ? tresse en paix tes corbeilles ;
Recueille en leur saison le miel de tes abeilles ;
Coupe pour tes brebis les feuillages nouveaux,
Et le temps, qui peut tout, emportera tes maux !—

C'est ainsi que chantait l'antique Polyphème ;
Et son amour s'enfuit avec sa chanson même,
Car les Muses, par qui se tarissent les pleurs,
Sont le remède unique à toutes nos douleurs.

[*Poèmes Antiques.*

LXXVIII

MIDI

Midi, roi des étés, épandu sur la plaine,
Tombe en nappes d'argent des hauteurs du ciel bleu.
Tout se tait. L'air flamboie et brûle sans haleine ;
La terre est assoupie en sa robe de feu.

L'étendue est immense et les champs n'ont point d'ombre,
Et la source est tarie où buvaient les troupeaux ;
La lointaine forêt, dont la lisière est sombre,
Dort là-bas, immobile, en un pesant repos.

Seuls, les grands blés mûris, tels qu'une mer dorée,
Se déroulent au loin, dédaigneux du sommeil ;
Pacifiques enfants de la terre sacrée,
Ils épuisent sans peur la coupe du soleil.

Parfois, comme un soupir de leur âme brûlante,
Du sein des épis lourds qui murmurent entre eux,
Une ondulation majestueuse et lente
S'éveille, et va mourir à l'horizon poudreux.

Non loin, quelques bœufs blancs, couchés parmi les herbes,
Bavent avec lenteur sur leurs fanons épais,
Et suivent de leurs yeux languissants et superbes
Le songe intérieur qu'ils n'achèvent jamais.

Homme, si, le cœur plein de joie ou d'amertume,
Tu passais vers midi dans les champs radieux,
Fuis ! la nature est vide et le soleil consume :
Rien n'est vivant ici, rien n'est triste ou joyeux.

Mais si, désabusé des larmes et du rire,
Altéré de l'oubli de ce monde agité,
Tu veux, ne sachant plus pardonner ou maudire,
Goûter une suprême et morne volupté,

Viens ! Le soleil te parle en paroles sublimes ;
Dans sa flamme implacable absorbe-toi sans fin ;
Et retourne à pas lents vers les cités infimes,
Le cœur trempé sept fois dans le néant divin.

[*Poèmes Antiques.*

LXXIX

Sacra Fames

L'immense mer sommeille. Elle hausse et balance
Ses houles où le ciel met d'éclatants îlots.
Une nuit d'or emplit d'un magique silence
La merveilleuse horreur de l'espace et des flots.

Les deux gouffres ne font qu'un abîme sans borne
De tristesse, de paix et d'éblouissement,
Sanctuaire et tombeau, désert splendide et morne
Où des millions d'yeux regardent fixement.

Tels, le ciel magnifique et les eaux vénérables
Dorment dans la lumière et dans la majesté,
Comme si la rumeur des vivants misérables
N'avait troublé jamais leur rêve illimité.

Cependant, plein de faim dans sa peau flasque et rude,
Le sinistre Rôdeur des steppes de la mer
Vient, va, tourne, et, flairant au loin la solitude,
Entre-bâille d'ennui ses mâchoires de fer.

Certes, il n'a souci de l'immensité bleue,
Des Trois Rois, du triangle ou du long Scorpion
Qui tord dans l'infini sa flamboyante queue,
Ni de l'Ourse qui plonge au clair Septentrion.

Il ne sait que la chair qu'on broie et qu'on dépèce,
Et, toujours absorbé dans son désir sanglant,
Au fond des masses d'eau lourdes d'une ombre épaisse
Il laisse errer son œil terne, impassible et lent.

Tout est vide et muet. Rien qui nage ou qui flotte,
Qui soit vivant ou mort, qu'il puisse entendre ou voir.
Il reste inerte, aveugle, et son grêle pilote
Se pose pour dormir sur son aileron noir.

Va, monstre ! tu n'es pas autre que nous ne sommes,
Plus hideux, plus féroce, ou plus désespéré.
Console-toi ! demain tu mangeras des hommes,
Demain par l'homme aussi tu seras dévoré.

La Faim sacrée est un long meurtre légitime
Des profondeurs de l'ombre aux cieux resplendissants,
Et l'homme et le requin, égorgeur ou victime
Devant ta face, ô Mort, sont tous deux innocents.

[*Poèmes Tragiques.*

LXXX

Le Sacre de Paris

I

O Paris ! c'est le cent deuxième nuit du Siège,
Une des nuits du grand Hiver.
Des murs à l'horizon l'écume de la neige
S'enfle et roule comme une mer.

Mâts sinistres dressés hors de ce flot livide,
Par endroits, du creux des vallons,
Quelques grêles clochers, tout noirs sur le ciel vide,
S'enlèvent, rigides et longs.

Là-bas, palais anciens semblables à des tombes,
Bois, villages, jardins, châteaux,
Effondrés, écrasés sous l'averse des bombes,
Fument au faîte des coteaux.

Dans l'étroite tranchée, entre les parois froides,
Le givre étreint de ses plis blancs
L'œil inerte, le front blême, les membres roides,
La chair dure des morts sanglants.

Les balles du Barbare ont troué ces poitrines
Et rompu ces cœurs généreux.
La rage du combat gonfle encor leurs narines,
Ils dorment là serrés entre eux.

L'âpre vent qui franchit la colline et la plaine
Vient, chargé d'exécrations,
De suprêmes fureurs, de vengeance et de haine,
Heurter les sombres bastions.

Il flagelle les lourds canons, meute géante
Qui veille allongée aux affûts,
Et souffle par instants dans leur gueule béante
Qu'il emplit d'un râle confus.

Il gronde sur l'amas des toits, neigeux décombre,
Sépulcre immense et déjà clos,
Mais d'où montent encor, lamentables, sans nombre,
Des murmures faits de sanglots;

Où l'enfant glacé meurt aux bras des pâles mères,
Où près de son foyer sans pain,
Le père, plein d'horreur et de larmes amères,
Étreint une arme dans sa main.

ii

Ville auguste, cerveau du monde, orgueil de l'homme,
Ruche immortelle des esprits,
Phare allumé dans l'ombre où sont Athène et Rome,
Astre des nations, Paris!

O nef inébranlable aux flots comme aux rafales,
Qui, sous le ciel noir ou clément,
Joyeuse, et déployant tes voiles triomphales,
Voguais victorieusement !

La foudre dans les yeux et brandissant la pique,
Guerrière au visage irrité,
Qui fis jaillir des plis de ta toge civique
La victoire et la liberté !

Toi qui courais pieds nus, irrésistible, agile,
Par le vieux monde rajeuni !
Qui, secouant les rois sur leur tréteau fragile,
Chantais, ivre de l'infini !

Nourrice des grands morts et des vivants célèbres,
Vénérable aux siècles jaloux,
Est-ce toi qui gémis ainsi dans les ténèbres
Et la face sur les genoux ?

Vois ! La horde au poil fauve assiège tes murailles !
Vil troupeau de sang altéré,
De la sainte patrie ils mangent les entrailles,
Ils bavent sur le sol sacré !

Tous les loups d'outre-Rhin ont mêlé leurs espèces :
Vandale, Germain et Teuton,
Ils sont tous là, hurlant de leurs gueules épaisses
Sous la lanière et le bâton.

Ils brûlent la forêt, rasent la citadelle,
Changent les villes en charnier ;
Et l'essaim des corbeaux retourne à tire d'aile,
Pour être venu le dernier.

iii

O Paris, qu'attends-tu ? la famine ou la honte ?
Furieuse et cheveux épars,
Sous l'aiguillon du sang qui dans ton cœur remonte
Va ! bondis hors de tes remparts !

Enfonce cette tourbe horrible où tu te rues,
Frappe, redouble, saigne, mords!
Vide sur eux palais, maisons, temples et rues:
Que les mourants vengent les morts!

Non, non! tu ne dois pas tomber, Ville sacrée,
Comme une victime à l'autel;
Non, non, non! tu ne peux finir, désespérée,
Que par un combat immortel.

Sur le noir escalier des bastions qu'éventre
Le choc rugissant des boulets,
Lutte! et rugis aussi, lionne au fond de l'antre,
Dans la masure et le palais.

Dans le carrefour plein de bris et de fumée,
Sur le toit, l'Arc et le clocher,
Allume pour mourir l'auréole enflammée
De l'inoubliable bûcher.

Consume tes erreurs, tes fautes, tes ivresses,
A jamais, dans ce feu si beau,
Pour qu'immortellement, Paris, tu te redresses,
Impérissable, du tombeau;

Pour que l'homme futur, ébloui dans ses veilles
Par ton sublime souvenir,
Raconte à d'autres cieux tes antiques merveilles
Que rien ne pourra plus ternir;

Et, saluant ton nom, adorant ton génie,
Quand il faudra rompre des fers,
Offre ta libre gloire et ta grande agonie
Comme un exemple à l'univers.

[*Poèmes Tragiques.*

Janvier 1871.

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

1821-1868

His father was over sixty when Charles Baudelaire was born—the only child of a disproportionate second marriage. The elder Baudelaire, who was the son of a small farmer in Champagne, had been well educated with a view to ordination and, after a short experience as an usher, had filled the post of tutor in a great family, where he was liberally treated and acquired fine manners and the doctrine of the Encyclopaedists. During the Terror he lived and supported his ruined patrons by giving lessons in drawing, and is said to have saved Condorcet from execution. He held a place in the administration of the Senate under the Consulate and the Empire; had painters and men of letters for his friends; and died not quite six years after the poet's birth.

Charles was only seven when his mother, still quite a young woman, married an officer, Major (afterwards General) Aupick. He seems to have taken real interest in his stepson; but besides the natural difficulties of such a situation—for the boy had a lively remembrance of his own father—an insurmountable antagonism was bound in time to show itself between a dreamer, impatient of control and disdainful of success, and a man of action, ambitious, a disciplinarian by temper and professional habit. At two public schools, in Lyons and Paris, young Baudelaire won prizes and a reputation for general ability: he left Louis-le-Grand abruptly and scandalously. His stepfather wished him to enter the diplomatic service: Baudelaire refused to do anything but write; and from 1839 to 1841 he led a somewhat riotous (and outwardly fruitless) life in Paris, indulging a hundred curiosities, among a crew of Bohemians more or less intellectual; until at last, after an open quarrel with General Aupick, his family, in alarm at his spendthrift idleness and the queer company he kept, put him on board a merchantman sailing from Bordeaux for the Indies under the charge of a friendly captain. It was hoped he might be attracted to commerce, or at least come home with a taste for some regular way of life; but the ten months spent at sea and in some fortunate island of the tropics only dazzled and hypnotised his senses, and provided his enchanted memory with a refuge from the

real. He returned to Paris on the eve of his majority and, possessed of material independence, began that life of studious dissipation, of feverish labour without fruition, joyless vice, discontent and remorse and vagabondage and exasperated idealism, of which the history or the legend has been used too often to supply an unedifying commentary on his writings.

Between 1842 and 1857—the great landmark in Baudelaire's career—his most notable work was done in art criticism: his *Salons* of 1845 and 1846 made some stir by their qualities of definiteness, absolute candour, technical competence, and by their vehement praise of Delacroix and Haussoullier. Here and there he contributed also a few poems, weird Hoffmannesque tales and literary articles to the reviews. A conscientious study on the 'philosophy of love' and several dramas (among which *L'Ivrogne* promised to be the most characteristic) never got beyond the stage of fragments. From 1852 onwards he devoted much time to the interpretation of Edgar Allan Poe. But before the publication of *Les Fleurs du Mal* Baudelaire was better known than his writings to literary Paris—known as a dandy of immaculate and imperturbable exterior, an ironist and mystifier in his talk, a night-bird insatiable in the pursuit of singular experiences,—and as the lover of a worthless and crapulous woman of colour, Jeanne Duval, who made him wretched and to whom he showed inexhaustible kindness. In 1848 he had thrown himself blindly into politics and started a 'Christian democratic' sheet which lasted for a few weeks; but a little later he accepted the management of a conservative paper in the provinces! He was soon discharged, and from the *Coup d'État* onwards took no more interest in public affairs.

In 1853 Baudelaire published his translation of *The Raven*, which had been heralded by a remarkable article on Poe's life and writings in *La Revue de Paris*; two volumes of Poe's Tales, turned into a French prose which is allowed to surpass the original, were brought out in 1856 and 1857. In this latter year, a friend who had set up a publishing business in a provincial town produced *Les Fleurs du Mal*. A collection of Baudelaire's poems had been curiously expected by a small number of intellectual men; the book drew praise, not unreserved, but warm and candid, from Hugo and Gautier, Sainte-Beuve and Barbey d'Aurevilly, E. Deschamps and Flaubert and other writers of worth: the public would probably have ignored it but for the prosecution of the author. The government of December

had recently shown its solicitude for propriety in print in the matter of *Madame Bovary*: its action in Baudelaire's case was more successful and assuredly better grounded; the six pieces ordered to be suppressed are by no means among the best in the volume, and the lubricity of two or three at least (though manifestly not of a marketable variety) throws their other qualities into the shade.

For a short period Baudelaire's life now became more regular and his activity more fruitful. He was reconciled with his mother, General Aupick being dead. In spite of premature infirmities, his debts and the exactions of usurers, the bankruptcy of his publisher and the reluctance of editors to take the work of a poet who had appeared in the police-courts, he laboured courageously and produced no small quantity of prose and verse in the next four years. His wonderful *Petits poèmes en prose*, familiar, metaphysical, allegorical and grotesque, were printed in various reviews; he continued his translation of Poe, for whose hysterical genius he had so long felt a mysterious sympathy; he added some exquisite pieces to *Les Fleurs du Mal* in view of a second edition which eventually appeared in 1861; and he published a strange farrago called *Les Paradis artificiels* in 1859, founded largely on experiments with haschisch (a soporific decoction of Indian hemp) and the reading of De Quincey's *Opium-Eater*, which he partly translated. He distinguished himself also as one of the earliest champions of Richard Wagner; became interested in the grim talent of the well-known draughtsman and war correspondent Constantin Guys; wrote some valuable papers on contemporary poets which, after appearing in a review, were incorporated with Crépet's great historical anthology *Les Poètes français*; —and conceived the singular ambition of entering the French Academy. He was twice a candidate—the second time for the chair of Lacordaire!—but was persuaded on each occasion to withdraw; and the best result of this aberration was a brief but pleasant intercourse with Alfred de Vigny in his last days.

Baudelaire's last books were translations of Poe which appeared in 1864 and 1865. In the former year he left Paris for Brussels with the idea of paying his debts by profits from lectures. His success as a lecturer on Gautier and Delacroix was short-lived; disagreements and misunderstandings with the agents left him penniless, hopeless and ailing. He founded new hopes on a book about Belgium, and took copious notes, and made many journeys up and down a country in which almost everything and every one exasperated him. His

health broke down entirely; alcohol, narcotics and moral and material insulation did the rest. In the spring of 1866 he had a paralytic stroke in a church at Namur and was taken back, henceforth speechless, to Brussels. He lingered for more than a year, tenderly nursed by Madame Aupick, and died in a private hospital in Paris.

The miserable life of Baudelaire does not account for the sinister inspiration of *Les Fleurs du Mal.* But he was born with a fatal avidity for sensations, and an intense consciousness of being irremediably alone. Given his genius, the infirmity of his will, an idealism which excluded all compromise, refused to take life as it came and constantly confronted his failures with an heroical second self, the course he ran and the poetry he made seem both to proceed from these two unhappy distinctions. His irony and his cynicism—the armour he wore against the importunity of the self-complacent and the temptations of an easy expansiveness—hardly detract from the desperate sincerity which is the final impression of his verse. He made himself the centre of the world; but there was in him an aristocracy which forbade the mercenary sob, the disorder, the revolted egoism of the debased romantic temper. Baudelaire was besieged by images of corruption and by a vision, partly a memory, of some material paradise; or rather, the sensation of death, the homesickness for an exotic bliss, are the poisonous excitants that continually sting all his faculties of perception at once—hearing, touch, smell as well as sight; and this is so rare among the poets that his merely visual power seems by comparison ordinary. The interchange of sensations with which Symbolism has made us familiar is a very frequent process of Baudelaire's: his authority with the Symbolists has been immense, in some degree through a real affinity (a common fastidium), more perhaps by accidental associations and actual misunderstanding: for his genius, upon the whole, is expressive rather than suggestive—he evokes the objects of sensation by naming them, rather than by naming other things;—and indeed we might go farther and say without much exaggeration that his art had many classical elements.

His verse (if we except what Gautier called his *sonnets libertins*) is scrupulously correct. In *Les Fleurs du Mal* the romantic type of Alexandrine is frequent, but it does not prevail: the rime is more often curious than rich: the general effects are solidity, logic, amplitude, volume, density. He loved long words; he used assonance before that subsidiary charm became common. Baudelaire

belongs to the type of artists who conceive easily and bring forth with anguish. Hence a certain languor and oppressiveness, and the extreme importance of details: hence also, here and there, a formality which some critics have not hesitated to brand as prosaicism.

Baudelaire is morbid, if excessive unhappiness is morbidity. He is also virile. The two things must be conciliated somehow. The little Baudelairiens who have an itch to seem satanic take trouble to be morbid and (superfluously) to be epicene. Unhappy, and virile, and sincere, and an artist—but no epithets will serve to draw him from his insulation. One thing should be added—his inspiration is essentially Christian: only a believer can blaspheme.

Charles Baudelaire's works and translations fill six volumes (*édition définitive*—Calmann Lévy, 1868-1870). Many prose fragments, notably two curious diaries, are to be read in M. E. Crépet's *Baudelaire Posthume*, published in 1887. The poems excluded from *Les Fleurs du Mal* have been reprinted under the title *Les Épaves*.

LXXXI

Préface

La sottise, l'erreur, le péché, la lésine,
Occupent nos esprits et travaillent nos corps,
Et nous alimentons nos aimables remords,
Comme les mendiants nourrissent leur vermine.

Nos péchés sont têtus, nos repentirs sont lâches;
Nous nous faisons payer grassement nos aveux,
Et nous rentrons gaîment dans le chemin bourbeux,
Croyant par de vils pleurs laver toutes nos taches.

Sur l'oreiller du mal c'est Satan Trismégiste
Qui berce longuement notre esprit enchanté,
Et le riche métal de notre volonté
Est tout vaporisé par ce savant chimiste.

C'est le Diable qui tient les fils qui nous remuent!
Aux objets répugnants nous trouvons des appas;
Chaque jour vers l'enfer nous descendons d'un pas,
Sans horreur, à travers des ténèbres qui puent.

Ainsi qu'un débauché pauvre qui baise et mange
Le sein martyrisé d'une antique catin,
Nous volons au passage un plaisir clandestin
Que nous pressons bien fort comme une vieille orange.

Serré, fourmillant, comme un million d'helminthes,
Dans nos cerveaux ribote un peuple de Démons,
Et, quand nous respirons, la Mort dans nos poumons
Descend, fleuve invisible, avec de sourdes plaintes.

Si le viol, le poison, le poignard, l'incendie,
N'ont pas encor brodé de leurs plaisants dessins
Le canevas banal de nos piteux destins,
C'est que notre âme, hélas! n'est pas assez hardie.

Mais parmi les chacals, les panthères, les lices,
Les singes, les scorpions, les vautours, les serpents,
Les monstres glapissants, hurlants, grognants, rampants
Dans la ménagerie infâme de nos vices,

Il en est un plus laid, plus méchant, plus immonde!
Quoiqu'il ne pousse ni grands gestes ni grands cris,
Il ferait volontiers de la terre un débris
Et dans un bâillement avalerait le monde;

C'est l'Ennui!—L'œil chargé d'un pleur involontaire,
Il rêve d'échafauds en fumant son houka.
Tu le connais, lecteur, ce monstre délicat,
—Hypocrite lecteur,—mon semblable,—mon frère.

[*Spleen et Idéal.*

LXXXII

J'aime le souvenir de ces époques nues
Dont Phœbus se plaisait à dorer les statues.
Alors l'homme et la femme en leur agilité
Jouissaient sans mensonge et sans anxiété,
Et, le ciel amoureux leur caressant l'échine,
Exerçaient la santé de leur noble machine.
Cybèle alors, fertile en produits généreux,
Ne trouvait point ses fils un poids trop onéreux,

Mais, louve au cœur gonflé de tendresses communes,
Abreuvait l'univers à ces tétines brunes.
L'homme élégant, robuste et fort, avait le droit
D'être fier des beautés qui le nommaient leur roi ;
Fruits purs de tout outrage et vierges de gerçures,
Dont la chair lisse et ferme appelait les morsures !

Le Poëte aujourd'hui, quand il veut concevoir
Ces natives grandeurs, aux lieux où se font voir
La nudité de l'homme et celle de la femme,
Sent un froid ténébreux envelopper son âme
Devant ce noir tableau plein d'épouvantement.
O monstruosités pleurant leur vêtement !
O ridicules troncs ! torses dignes des masques !
O pauvres corps tordus, maigres, ventrus ou flasques,
Que le dieu de l'Utile, implacable et serein,
Enfants, emmaillotta dans ses langes d'airain !
Et vous, femmes, hélas ! pâles avec des cierges,
Que ronge et que nourrit la débauche, et vous, vierges,
Du vice maternel traînant l'hérédité
Et toutes les hideurs de la fécondité !

Nous avons, il est vrai, nations corrompues,
Aux peuples anciens des beautés inconnues :
Des visages rongés par les chancres du cœur,
Et comme qui dirait des beautés de langueur ;
Mais ces inventions de nos muses tardives
N'empêcheront jamais les races maladives
De rendre à la jeunesse un hommage profond,
—A la sainte jeunesse, à l'air simple, au doux front,
A l'œil limpide et clair ainsi qu'une eau courante,
Et qui va répandant sur tout, insouciante
Comme l'azur du ciel, les oiseaux et les fleurs,
Ses parfums, ses chansons et ses douces chaleurs.

[*Spleen et Idéal.*

LXXXIII

Parfum Exotique

Quand, les deux yeux fermés, en un soir chaud d'automne,
Je respire l'odeur de ton sein chaleureux,
Je vois se dérouler des rivages heureux
Qu'éblouissent les feux d'un soleil monotone;

Une île paresseuse où la nature donne
Des arbres singuliers et des fruits savoureux;
Des hommes dont le corps est mince et vigoureux,
Et des femmes dont l'œil par sa franchise étonne.

Guidé par ton odeur vers de charmants climats,
Je vois un port rempli de voiles et de mâts
Encor tout fatigués par la vague marine,

Pendant que le parfum des verts tamariniers,
Qui circule dans l'air et m'enfle la narine,
Se mêle dans mon âme au chant des mariniers.

[*Spleen et Idéal.*

LXXXIV

Une Charogne

Rappelez-vous l'objet que nous vîmes, mon âme,
Ce beau matin d'été si doux:
Au détour d'un sentier une charogne infâme
Sur un lit semé de cailloux,

Les jambes en l'air, comme une femme lubrique,
Brûlante et suant les poisons,
Ouvrait d'une façon nonchalante et cynique
Son ventre plein d'exhalaisons.

Le soleil rayonnait sur cette pourriture,
Comme afin de la cuire à point,
Et de rendre au centuple à la grande Nature
Tout ce qu'ensemble elle avait joint;

Et le ciel regardait la carcasse superbe
Comme une fleur s'épanouir.
La puanteur était si forte, que sur l'herbe
Vous crûtes vous évanouir.

Les mouches bourdonnaient sur ce ventre putride,
D'où sortaient de noirs bataillons
De larves, qui coulaient comme un épais liquide
Le long de ces vivants haillons.

Tout cela descendait, montait comme une vague,
Ou s'élançait en pétillant;
On eût dit que le corps, enflé d'un souffle vague,
Vivait en se multipliant.

Et ce monde rendait une étrange musique,
Comme l'eau courante et le vent,
Ou le grain qu'un vanneur d'un mouvement rhythmique
Agite et tourne dans son van.

Les formes s'effaçaient et n'étaient plus qu'un rêve,
Une ébauche lente à venir
Sur la toile oubliée, et que l'artiste achève
Seulement par le souvenir.

Derrière les rochers une chienne inquiète
Nous regardait d'un air fâché,
Épiant le moment de reprendre au squelette
Le morceau qu'elle avait lâché.

— Et pourtant vous serez semblable à cette ordure,
A cette horrible infection,
Étoile de mes yeux, soleil de ma nature,
Vous, mon ange et ma passion!

Oui! telle vous serez, ô la reine des grâces,
Après les derniers sacrements,
Quand vous irez, sous l'herbe et les floraisons grasses,
Moisir parmi les ossements.

Alors, ô ma beauté! dites à la vermine
Qui vous mangera de baisers,
Que j'ai gardé la forme et l'essence divine
De mes amours décomposés!

[*Spleen et Idéal.*

LXXXV

Le Beau Navire

Je veux te raconter, ô molle enchanteresse!
Les diverses beautés qui parent ta jeunesse;
Je veux te peindre ta beauté,
Où l'enfance s'allie à la maturité.

Quand tu vas balayant l'air de ta jupe large,
Tu fais l'effet d'un beau vaisseau qui prend le large,
Chargé de toile, et va roulant
Suivant un rhythme doux, et paresseux, et lent.

Sur ton cou large et rond, sur tes épaules grasses,
Ta tête se pavane avec d'étranges grâces;
D'un air placide et triomphant
Tu passes ton chemin, majestueuse enfant.

Je veux te raconter, ô molle enchanteresse!
Les diverses beautés qui parent ta jeunesse;
Je veux te peindre ta beauté,
Où l'enfance s'allie à la maturité.

Ta gorge qui s'avance et qui pousse la moire,
Ta gorge triomphante est une belle armoire
Dont les panneaux bombés et clairs
Comme les boucliers accrochent des éclairs;

Boucliers provoquants, armés de pointes roses!
Armoire à doux secrets, pleine de bonnes choses,
De vins, de parfums, de liqueurs
Qui feraient délirer les cerveaux et les cœurs!

Quand tu vas balayant l'air de ta jupe large,
Tu fais l'effet d'un beau vaisseau qui prend le large,
Chargé de toile, et va roulant
Suivant un rhythme doux, et paresseux, et lent.

Tes nobles jambes, sous les volants qu'elles chassent,
Tourmentent les désirs obscurs et les agacent,
Comme deux sorcières qui font
Tourner un philtre noir dans un vase profond.

Tes bras, qui se joueraient des précoces Hercules,
Sont des boas luisants les solides émules,
Faits pour serrer obstinément,
Comme pour l'imprimer dans ton cœur, ton amant.

Sur ton cou large et rond, sur tes épaules grasses,
Ta tête se pavane avec d'étranges grâces;
D'un air placide et triomphant
Tu passes ton chemin, majestueuse enfant.

[*Spleen et Idéal.*

LXXXVI

L'Irréparable

Pouvons-nous étouffer le vieux, le long Remords,
Qui vit, s'agite et se tortille
Et se nourrit de nous comme le ver des morts,
Comme du chêne la chenille?
Pouvons-nous étouffer l'implacable Remords?

Dans quel philtre, dans quel vin, dans quelle tisane,
Noierons-nous ce vieil ennemi,
Destructeur et gourmand comme la courtisane,
Patient comme la fourmi?
Dans quel philtre?—dans quel vin?—dans quelle tisane?

Dis-le, belle sorcière, oh! dis, si tu le sais,
A cet esprit comblé d'angoisse
Et pareil au mourant qu'écrasent les blessés,
Que le sabot du cheval froisse;
Dis-le, belle sorcière, oh! dis, si tu le sais,

A cet agonisant que le loup déjà flaire
Et que surveille le corbeau,
A ce soldat brisé ! s'il faut qu'il désespère
D'avoir sa croix et son tombeau ;
Ce pauvre agonisant que déjà le loup flaire !

Peut-on illuminer un ciel bourbeux et noir ?
Peut-on déchirer des ténèbres
Plus denses que la poix, sans matin et sans soir,
Sans astres, sans éclairs funèbres ?
Peut-on illuminer un ciel bourbeux et noir ?

L'Espérance qui brille aux carreaux de l'Auberge
Est soufflée, est morte à jamais !
Sans lune et sans rayons, trouver où l'on héberge
Les martyrs d'un chemin mauvais !
Le Diable a tout éteint aux carreaux de l'Auberge !

Adorable sorcière, aimes-tu les damnés ?
Dis, connais-tu l'irrémissible ?
Connais-tu le Remords, aux traits empoisonnés,
A qui notre cœur sert de cible ?
Adorable sorcière, connais-tu les damnés ?

L'irréparable ronge avec sa dent maudite
Notre âme, piteux monument,
Et souvent il attaque, ainsi que le termite,
Par la base le bâtiment.
L'irréparable ronge avec sa dent maudite !

ii

J'ai vu parfois, au fond d'un théâtre banal
Qu'enflammait l'orchestre sonore,
Une fée allumer dans un ciel infernal
Une miraculeuse aurore ;
J'ai vu parfois, au fond d'un théâtre banal

Un être, qui n'était que lumière, or et gaze,
Terrasser l'énorme Satan ;

Mais mon cœur, que jamais ne visite l'extase,
Est un théâtre où l'on attend
Toujours, toujours en vain, l'Être aux ailes de gaze.

[*Spleen et Idéal.*

LXXXVII

Le Vin de l'Assassin

Ma femme est morte, je suis libre !
Je puis donc boire tout mon soûl.
Lorsque je rentrais sans un sou,
Ses cris me déchiraient la fibre.

Autant qu'un roi je suis heureux ;
L'air est pur, le ciel admirable . . .
Nous avions un été semblable
Lorsque je devins amoureux !

L'horrible soif qui me déchire
Aurait besoin pour s'assouvir
D'autant de vin qu'en peut tenir
Son tombeau ;—ce n'est pas peu dire.

Je l'ai jetée au fond d'un puits,
Et j'ai même poussé sur elle
Tous les pavés de la margelle.
— Je l'oublierai si je le puis !

Au nom des serments de tendresse
Dont rien ne peut nous délier,
Et pour nous réconcilier
Comme au beau temps de notre ivresse,

J'implorai d'elle un rendez-vous
Le soir, sur une route obscure.
Elle y vint !—folle créature !
Nous sommes tous plus ou moins fous !

Elle était encore jolie,
Quoique bien fatiguée ! et moi,
Je l'aimai trop ! voilà pourquoi
Je lui dis : Sors de cette vie !

Nul ne peut me comprendre. Un seul
Parmi ces ivrognes stupides
Songea-t-il dans ses nuits morbides
A faire du vin un linceul ?

Cette crapule invulnérable
Comme les machines de fer
Jamais, ni l'été ni l'hiver,
N'a connu l'amour véritable,

Avec ses noirs enchantements,
Son cortège infernal d'alarmes,
Ses fioles de poison, ses larmes,
Ses bruits de chaîne et d'ossements !

— Me voilà libre et solitaire !
Je serai ce soir ivre mort :
Alors, sans peur et sans remord,
Je me coucherai sur la terre,

Et je dormirai comme un chien !
Le chariot aux lourdes roues
Chargé de pierres et de boues,
Le wagon enragé peut bien

Écraser ma tête coupable
Ou me couper par le milieu,
Je m'en moque comme de Dieu,
Du Diable ou de la Sainte Table !

[*Le Vin.*

LXXXVIII

La Béatrice

Dans des terrains cendreux, calcinés, sans verdure,
Comme je me plaignais un jour à la nature,
Et que de ma pensée, en vaguant au hasard,
J'aiguisais lentement sur mon cœur le poignard,
Je vis en plein midi descendre sur ma tête
Un nuage funèbre et gros d'une tempête,

Qui portait un troupeau de démons vicieux,
Semblables à des nains cruels et curieux.
A me considérer froidement ils se mirent,
Et, comme des passants sur un fou qu'ils admirent,
Je les entendis rire et chuchoter entre eux,
En échangeant maint signe et maint clignement d'yeux :

— 'Contemplons à loisir cette caricature
Et cette ombre d'Hamlet imitant sa posture,
Le regard indécis et les cheveux au vent.
N'est-ce pas grand' pitié de voir ce bon vivant,
Ce gueux, cet histrion en vacances, ce drôle,
Parce qu'il sait jouer artistement son rôle,
Vouloir intéresser au chant de ses douleurs
Les aigles, les grillons, les ruisseaux et les fleurs,
Et même à nous, auteurs de ces vieilles rubriques,
Réciter en hurlant ses tirades publiques ?'

J'aurais pu (mon orgueil aussi haut que les monts
Domine la nuée et le cri des démons)
Détourner simplement ma tête souveraine,
Si je n'eusse pas vu parmi leur troupe obscène,
Crime qui n'a pas fait chanceler le soleil !
La reine de mon cœur au regard nonpareil
Qui riait avec eux de ma sombre détresse
Et leur versait parfois quelque sale caresse.

[*Fleurs du Mal.*

LÉON DIERX

1838

Born like his master at Réunion, M. Léon Dierx received his early education in that island, came to Paris for higher studies, and subsequently entered the Education Office. *Poèmes et Poésies* appeared in 1864, and he was well represented in the original *Parnasse Contemporain*. *Les Lèvres Closes* followed in 1867, *Paroles d'un Vaincu* just after the War, *Les Amants* in 1879. He has published little or no new poetry for some years.

Among the less conspicuous followers of Leconte de Lisle, M. Dierx is distinguished as an admirable craftsman, especially ardent in the pursuit of melodious effects. He has a discreet, not too impassive, personal manner, the gift of winning sympathy by hardly suggesting an intimate disquietude and disillusion stoically contained; and a voluptuous, a tropical languor in his interpretation of life. In the Parnassian group he stood near Villiers, Mallarmé and Verlaine: by several of his qualities as an artist, he anticipates Samain—a more effective poet.

His complete works are in two volumes (Paris, Lemerre).

LXXXIX

Journée d'Hiver

Ce matin, nul rayon n'a pénétré la brume,
Et le lâche soleil est monté sans rien voir.
Aujourd'hui, dans mes yeux, nul désir ne s'allume;
Songe au présent, mon âme, et cesse de vouloir!

Le vieil astre s'éteint comme un bloc sur l'enclume,
Et rien n'a rejailli sur les rideaux du soir.
Je sombre tout entier dans ma propre amertume;
Songe au passé, mon âme, et vois comme il est noir!

Les anges de la nuit traînent leurs lourds suaires;
Ils ne suspendront pas leurs lampes au plafond;
Mon âme, songe à ceux qui sans pleurer s'en vont!

Songe aux échos muets des anciens sanctuaires!
Sépulcre aussi, rempli de cendres jusqu'aux bords,
Mon âme, songe à l'ombre, au sommeil, songe aux morts!

[*Les Lèvres Closes.*

SULLY-PRUDHOMME

1839-1907

René-François-Armand Prudhomme, the son of a merchant, was born in Paris and educated at the Lycée Condorcet. He tried two professions, engineering and the law, but found neither congenial; and having some means, he early determined to devote himself wholly to letters. The appearance of his first volume, *Stances et Poésies* (1865), coincided with the formation of the Parnassian group; and finding himself in general sympathy with the aims of Leconte de Lisle, he took a prominent place among the contributors to *Le Parnasse*. The year after, *Les Épreuves* followed *Stances et Poésies*: together with miscellaneous lyrics the collection contains a fine effort in imaginative satire, *Les Écuries d'Augias*, and a number of sketches suggested by Italian travel. *Les Solitudes* (1869), *Impressions de Guerre*, *Les Destins* (1872), *Vaines Tendresses* (1875), further defined the original bent of his talent, which unites a refined sense of form with systematic thought. In 1869 a remarkably sympathetic and luminous rendering into French verse of the first book of Lucretius prepared the way for two long philosophical poems, *La Justice* and *Le Bonheur*, which appeared in 1878 and in 1888 respectively. In recent years Sully-Prudhomme, who became an Academician in 1881, wrote comparatively little poetry. His prose writings include an important treatise on artistic expression, another (of a moderately conservative tendency) on versification, afterwards incorporated in a more general work, *Mon Testament poétique*; and some papers on Pascal contributed to *La Revue des Deux Mondes* in 1895.

As a poet Sully-Prudhomme is always interesting, and sometimes exquisite; he has dignity, conspicuous sincerity and a grave respect for his art, to the theory of which he devoted much attention. In many of his shorter poems, and in the general conception of *Le Bonheur*, he displayed a genuine power of allegorical invention and much felicity in choosing sensible shapes for moral and metaphysical ideas, though too often his metaphors want spontaneity, as if the poet could not forget that they are metaphors. He is impersonal and impassive, according to the Parnassian formula: that is to say, he endeavoured to see things 'as they are'; his themes are objective; his

agnosticism and pervading sadness are serene and without rancour. The humanitarian strain in Sully-Prudhomme recalls Victor de Laprade, who was, like him, what is emphatically called a thinker. Possessed of solid scientific attainments and the true philosophical temper, Sully-Prudhomme accomplished something of a feat in versifying a body of thought which would have claimed attention even in prose; for his analysis of the idea of justice, for instance, is lucid, precise, orderly and original. And he was a genuine poet as well as a genuine thinker: unfortunately the philosopher in him is too often separable from the artist, and the disparity between the solid doctrine and the somewhat precious forms in which he chose to convey it does injustice to both characters. It is, in fact, too late in the day for a philosophical poetry, and we are fatally conscious of a double aim.

Œuvres poétiques de Sully-Prudhomme: Volumes i.-v. (1865-1888): Lemerre.

XC

Le Vase brisé

Le vase où meurt cette verveine
D'un coup d'éventail fut fêlé;
Le coup dut effleurer à peine:
Aucun bruit ne l'a révélé.

Mais la légère meurtrissure,
Mordant le cristal chaque jour,
D'une marche invisible et sûre
En a fait lentement le tour.

Son eau fraîche a fui goutte à goutte,
Le suc des fleurs s'est épuisé;
Personne encore ne s'en doute;
N'y touchez pas: il est brisé.

Souvent aussi la main qu'on aime,
Effleurant le cœur, le meurtrit;
Puis le cœur se fend de lui-même,
La fleur de son amour périt;

Toujours intact aux yeux du monde,
Il sent croître et pleurer tout bas
Sa blessure fine et profonde;
Il est brisé: n'y touchez pas.

[*Stances*: La Vie intérieure.

XCI

VOIX DE LA TERRE

Tu montes vainement, ô vivante marée,
De tous les cris humains par la terre poussés!
Contre les fiers soleils, vagabonde égarée,
Tes flots aigus se sont vainement émoussés!

Tu n'es par aucun d'eux au passage accueillie;
Tu peux longtemps encor dans l'infini courir:
Chaque étoile à son tour par ta houle assaillie
La sent glisser à peine et dans la nuit mourir.

Quand pour l'une tu fuis, au loin diminuée,
Pour une autre déjà tu grandis; mais toujours
Ton douloureux concert de plainte et de huée
Dans son ascension trouve les astres sourds!

Pourtant reste fidèle à la recherche errante:
Peut-être existe-t-il, plus haut encore aux cieux,
Une sphère moins sourde et moins indifférente
Qui t'est moins étrangère et te comprendra mieux.

[*Le Bonheur*, iii.

PAUL VERLAINE

1844-1896

He was born at Metz in Lorraine. His family came from the Belgian Ardennes, but his father was a French captain of engineers. He had a classical education in Paris; was for some time a clerk, first in an insurance office and then in the Civil Service; and as a stripling began to frequent the 'Parnassian' group of poets. He married, unhappily, in 1870, adhered to the Commune, travelled with the youthful Arthur Rimbaud and, at Brussels, was tried and sentenced to two years' imprisonment for shooting his friend in a drunken quarrel. His sincere (if only poetically fruitful) conversion in the gaol at Mons is the most significant event of his life, which is only too well known. Verlaine's improvidence and waywardness and vices—drink was the most disastrous of them—have been probably exaggerated and certainly exploited by friends and enemies. For some time he was an usher in England, and towards the end of his career he gave lectures in Belgium, Holland, the French provinces, England, and contributed to respectable reviews. He spent years, on and off, in the hospitals of Paris; and died in squalid surroundings at the beginning of 1896. Rags and beggary, a reedy will and a tender heart, childish inconsequence and a childlike faith and an unreasonable cheerfulness which seldom deserted him in gaol or tavern or sickward—these things make of 'Poor Lelian' an almost legendary figure, not unlovable, which falls readily into its place in a subordinate tradition of French literature, the tradition of riming vagabondage begun by Rutebeuf and Villon and carried on from Villon to Mathurin Régnier, from Régnier to Piron and from Piron to more than one singer of our day.

Verlaine's rank as a poet is still hotly disputed. The phrase 'a transitional Parnassian' defines him aptly, at least on the formal side of his art. While immensely influenced from boyhood by *Les Fleurs du Mal*, he began by accepting the ideal of Leconte de Lisle and his disciples—the exact and impassive record of concrete sensations in metallic, irreproachable verse. Later, an inevitable reaction claimed him: he became emphatically a *personal* lyrist, and for Verlaine personality was perhaps rather the old romantic egoism, with an added candour, than the waste of evanescent moods which the typical

symbolist 'evokes' by obscure and singular associations with the sensible world. Yet he may fairly be said to have first, among French poets, recognised the whole charm of the word half spoken. A real master of expression, who quite evidently thought in verse, he often preferred to *suggest* merely, and he carried the semblance of a fluid artlessness in discourse to the frontiers of genius and insipidity. His verse is of very various quality. Much or most of it is not only firm and regular, but rigorous; and when he chooses to be demure, his sober utterance has almost the virtues of Racine's, without the pride of carriage. Racine alone, and possibly Lamartine, can match his natural sensitiveness to the merely sonorous value of words—a gift he presumed on. Not all his experiments with harmony and rhythm (assonance encroaching upon the prerogatives of rime, lines docked of a syllable to disconcert the ear, etc.) are happy. Their common tendency is towards equivocation. But in general his form is respectful of traditions, even when they rely on conventions grown hollow; and he carried the dislocation of the Alexandrine, in particular, no farther really than the stage it had reached before him, in which a new rhythm is still marriageable with the old. Verlaine has often attained an aerial tenderness, and as often sunk to an earthiness and triviality, which are equally characteristic. He had the secret of faltering with grace, and he is less intellectually clear than emotionally simple. *Celare artem* was his sovereign art.

Principal Works:—*Poèmes Saturniens* (1866); *Les Fêtes Galantes* (1869); *La Bonne Chanson* (1870); *Romances sans Paroles* (1874, at Sens); *Sagesse* (1881); *Jadis et Naguère* (1884); *Amour* (1888); *Parallèlement* (1889); *Bonheur* (1891); *Chansons pour Elle* (1893); *Les Invectives* (posthumous); *Œuvres Posthumes* (1903). In Prose: *Les poètes maudits*, *Louise Leclercq*, *Mémoires d'un veuf*, *Mes Hôpitaux*, *Mes Prisons*. The complete works have been published in five volumes (Paris: Librairie Vanier). M. Edmond Lepelletier's book, *Paul Verlaine, sa vie, son œuvre* (Paris, 1907), has now been translated into English.

XCII

RÉSIGNATION

Tout enfant, j'allais rêvant Ko-Hinnor,
Somptuosité persane et papale,
Héliogabale et Sardanapale!

Mon désir créait sous des toits en or,
Parmi les parfums, au son des musiques,
Des harems sans fin, paradis physiques!

Aujourd'hui, plus calme et non moins ardent,
Mais sachant la vie et qu'il faut qu'on plie,
J'ai dû refréner ma belle folie,
Sans me résigner par trop cependant.

Soit! le grandiose échappe à ma dent,
Mais, fi de l'aimable et fi de la lie!
Et je hais toujours la femme jolie,
La rime assonante et l'ami prudent.

[*Poèmes Saturniens.*

XCIII

MON RÊVE FAMILIER

Je fais souvent ce rêve étrange et pénétrant
D'une femme inconnue, et que j'aime, et qui m'aime,
Et qui n'est, chaque fois, ni tout à fait la même
Ni tout à fait une autre, et m'aime et me comprend.

Car elle me comprend, et mon cœur, transparent
Pour elle seule, hélas! cesse d'être un problème
Pour elle seule, et les moiteurs de mon front blême,
Elle seule les sait rafraîchir, en pleurant.

Est-elle brune, blonde ou rousse?—Je l'ignore.
Son nom? Je me souviens qu'il est doux et sonore
Comme ceux des aimés que la Vie exila.

Son regard est pareil au regard des statues,
Et, pour sa voix, lointaine, et calme, et grave, elle a
L'inflexion des voix chères qui se sont tues.

[*Poèmes Saturniens.*

XCIV

Bon chevalier masqué qui chevauche en silence,
Le malheur a percé mon vieux cœur de sa lance.

Le sang de mon vieux cœur n'a fait qu'un jet vermeil,
Puis s'est évaporé sur les fleurs, au soleil.

L'ombre éteignit mes yeux, un cri vint à ma bouche,
Et mon vieux cœur est mort dans un frisson farouche.

Alors le chevalier Malheur s'est rapproché,
Il a mis pied à terre et sa main m'a touché.

Son doigt ganté de fer entra dans ma blessure,
Tandis qu'il attestait sa loi d'une voix dure.

Et voici qu'au contact glacé du doigt de fer
Un cœur me renaissait, tout un cœur pur et fier.

Et voici que, fervent d'une candeur divine,
Tout un cœur jeune et bon battit dans ma poitrine.

Or, je restais tremblant, ivre, incrédule un peu,
Comme un homme qui voit des visions de Dieu.

Mais le bon chevalier, remonté sur sa bête,
En s'éloignant me fit un signe de la tête

Et me cria (j'entends encore cette voix) :
Au moins, prudence ! Car c'est bon pour une fois.'

[*Sagesse.*

XCV

Beauté des femmes, leur faiblesse, et ces mains pâles
Qui font souvent le bien et peuvent tout le mal.
Et ces yeux où plus rien ne reste d'animal
Que juste assez pour dire : 'assez' aux fureurs mâles.

Et toujours, maternelle endormeuse des râles,
Même quand elle ment, cette voix ! Matinal
Appel, ou chant bien doux à vêpre, ou frais signal,
Ou beau sanglot qui va mourir au pli des châles ! . . .

Hommes durs ! Vie atroce et laide d'ici-bas !
Ah ! que du moins, loin des baisers et des combats,
Quelque chose demeure un peu sur la montagne,

Quelque chose du cœur enfantin et subtil,
Bonté, respect! Car qu'est-ce qui nous accompagne,
Et vraiment, quand la mort viendra, que reste-t-il?

[*Sagesse.*

XCVI

Écoutez la chanson bien douce
Qui ne pleure que pour vous plaire.
Elle est discrète, elle est légère:
Un frisson d'eau sur de la mousse!

La voix vous fut connue (et chère?),
Mais à présent elle est voilée
Comme une veuve désolée,
Pourtant comme elle encore fière,

Et dans les longs plis de son voile
Qui palpite aux brises d'automne,
Cache et montre au cœur qui s'étonne
La vérité comme une étoile.

Elle dit, la voix reconnue,
Que la bonté c'est notre vie,
Que de la haine et de l'envie
Rien ne reste, la mort venue.

Elle parle aussi de la gloire
D'être simple sans plus attendre,
Et de noces d'or et du tendre
Bonheur d'une paix sans victoire.

Accueillez la voix qui persiste
Dans son naïf épithalame.
Allez, rien n'est meilleur à l'âme
Que de faire une âme moins triste!

Elle est en peine et de passage,
L'âme qui souffre sans colère,
Et comme sa morale est claire! . . .
Écoutez la chanson bien sage.

[*Sagesse.*

FRANÇOIS COPPÉE

1842-1908

François Coppée was a Parisian born and bred—the son of a small official in the French War Office, claiming kinship, it is believed, with a Walloon family which had already produced a poet of some consideration in the seventeenth century. As a child he had delicate health, and his schooling at the Lycée Saint-Louis was interrupted. He began life as a shorthand clerk in the war office. M. Catulle Mendès found hospitality in the periodicals for his early verses, and personal acquaintance and intellectual sympathy with Leconte de Lisle and his group led to the young poet's being included in *Le Parnasse contemporain.* Coppée's first volume, *Le Reliquaire* (1866), is purely Parnassian; its successor, *Les Intimités,* with a more personal note, confirmed the impression of facility and clear perceptions and careful work. *Poèmes Modernes* (1869) fixed, if not his rank, at least his peculiar domain: after the immensely popular 'Grève des Forgerons' Coppée was accepted as the poet of humble lives, and particularly of the decent Paris poor; and within that range he remained most uniformly successful in his later collections of poetry, though *Les Récits et les Élégies* (1878)—mainly transcriptions from the Bible and the Koran—and the more recent *Paroles Sincères* show excellence in quite other veins. But since the year of national calamity (to which he paid his poetical tribute) he earned no small part of his popularity by prose stories and by plays. In 1869 he had already obtained a striking success at the Odéon with *Le Passant,* which, by the way, first revealed the talent of Mme. Sarah Bernhardt; and his reputation as a dramatist rose successively with *Fais ce que dois, Le Luthier de Crémone,* and *Le Justicier* (first entitled *Pour la Couronne*). Of his prose writings it is enough to mention *Contes rapides,* the autobiographical *Toute une Jeunesse* (1890), and the engaging record of a sincere conversion called *La Bonne Souffrance.*

Appointed sub-librarian to the Senate in 1869, he resigned the post three years later in favour of Leconte de Lisle, and was then for a short time in charge of the Archives of the Comédie Française. He wrote a great deal of dramatic criticism between then and 1884, when

he succeeded Victor de Laprade at the French Academy. In recent years, Coppée took a somewhat active part as a political propagandist, until ill-health forced him into complete retirement. He died last summer after a protracted illness.

As a lyrist, Coppée began by betraying his models too obviously in descriptions perhaps a little garish in colour, and sentimental anecdotes somewhat wanting in sincerity. Thanks to an intelligent study of manners and real sympathy, he soon rose far above mere aptitude in the best of his *genre* pieces, which are conspicuous examples of the close connection between Parnassus and a certain sort of realism. It may be said that his pathos is insistent, that he calculates emotional effects without allowing for the recoil, that his conceptions are often unsubstantial or invertebrate. But he was without question a keen observer, a charming and familiar narrator, and had many moments of cordial inspiration. From the first the quality of his verse was always transparent, neat and sure, conscientious if deficient in amplitude, flexible enough, if rather mechanical in its variety—and, above all else, eminently accessible.

The poetry and most of the other writings of François Coppée may be read in Lemerre's *Édition Elzévirienne.*

XCVII

A UNE TULIPE

O rare fleur, ô fleur de luxe et de décor,
Sur ta tige toujours dressée et triomphante,
Le Velasquez eût mis à la main d'une infante
Ton calice lamé d'argent, de pourpre et d'or.

Mais, détestant l'amour que ta splendeur enfante,
Maîtresse esclave, ainsi que la veuve d'Hector,
Sous la loupe d'un vieux, inutile trésor,
Tu t'alanguis dans une atmosphère étouffante,

Tu penses à tes sœurs des grands parcs, et tu peux
Regretter le gazon des boulingrins pompeux
La fraîcheur du jet d'eau, l'ombrage du platane;

Car tu n'as pour amant qu'un bourgeois de Harlem.
Et dans la serre chaude ainsi qu'en un harem
S'exhalent sans parfum tes ennuis de sultane.

[*Poèmes divers*

XCVIII

Une Aumône

Fumant à ma fenêtre, en été, chaque soir,
Je voyais cette femme, à l'angle d'un trottoir,
S'offrir à tous ainsi qu'une chose à l'enchère.
Non loin de là, s'ouvrait une porte cochère
Où l'on entendait geindre, en s'abritant dessous,
Une fillette avec des bouquets de deux sous.
Et celle qui traînait la soie et l'infamie
Attendait que l'enfant se fût bien endormie,
Et lui faisait alors l'aumône seulement.
—Tu lui pardonneras, n'est-ce pas ? Dieu clément !

[*Contes et Poésies.*

JOSÉ-MARIA DE HEREDIA

1842-1905

By birth a Cuban, Heredia came of old Spanish colonial stock on his father's side, and claimed one of the first Conquistadores of New Spain among his ancestors; but his mother was French, descended from a *président à mortier* of the Norman Parliament. He was sent to France as a young child and lived at Senlis till he was sixteen; then, after a year at the University of Havana in his native island, he settled in Paris and studied history and palaeography at the École des Chartes. His first published verses appeared in 1862 in *La Revue de Paris*; here and there he contributed to other periodicals and to the successive *Parnasses*; but it was not till 1893 that *Les Trophées* (which still remains his only volume of poetry) justified its name and the esteem in which a small circle of writers had long held his talent, by one of the purest triumphs of contemporary letters: the Symbolists themselves had the candour to applaud, against all the principles of their revolt. Three years later Heredia succeeded his friend and master Leconte de Lisle at the Academy: he was for some time the keeper of the Mazarine Library. A very little more of his poetry was printed in one or other of the reviews a short time before his death.

Les Trophées is a quintessential work, a monument of artistic probity which might well be the achievement of a lifetime. Its subjects illustrate once more the perennial attraction of the distant in time and space for the poet whose ideal can only be satisfied if he can reconcile the religion of form with the scruple of reality: the blameless mould in which most of this poetry is cast confirms Boileau's possibly thoughtless eulogy of the sonnet. Each piece is microcosmic: the art and the life (particularly the familiar life) of ancient Greece and Italy, of France in the Middle Ages and at the Renaissance, of Spain and modern Brittany and Japan, have passed through the still of an imagination almost scientific in its demand for precision, but human in its very impartiality.

The limitations of the poet are those of his school: a hardness of outline which implies sometimes a misconception of the material, an exaggerated economy which tends to sweat the life out of a word, the

frigidity which results from a disproportionate effort to reconstitute the externals of existence. If it were at all useful to compare him with his master, it might be said of Heredia that his vision is manifestly less large, his flight less strong, his aim less significant than that of Leconte de Lisle; while on the other hand he is more truly impassive, more constantly avoids the vice of emphasis, and is a sounder scholar within his range—though unluckily he has followed the author of *Poèmes Barbares* in the use of some pedantic forms. His verse, full, sumptuous, pellucid, and singularly varied for its compass, is his own, and uniformly admirable.

XCIX

ANTOINE ET CLÉOPÂTRE

Tous deux ils regardaient, de la haute terrasse,
L'Égypte s'endormir sous un ciel étouffant
Et le Fleuve, à travers le Delta noir qu'il fend,
Vers Bubaste ou Saïs rouler son onde grasse.

Et le Romain sentait sous la lourde cuirasse,
Soldat captif berçant le sommeil d'un enfant,
Ployer et défaillir sur son cœur triomphant
Le corps voluptueux que son étreinte embrasse.

Tournant sa tête pâle entre ses cheveux bruns
Vers celui qu'enivraient d'invincibles parfums,
Elle tendit sa bouche et ses prunelles claires;

Et sur elle courbé, l'ardent Imperator
Vit dans ses larges yeux étoilés de points d'or
Toute une mer immense où fuyaient des galères.

C

LE LIT

Qu'il soit encourtiné de brocart ou de serge,
Triste comme une tombe ou joyeux comme un nid,
C'est là que l'homme naît, se repose et s'unit,
Enfant, époux, vieillard, aïeule, femme ou vierge.

Funèbre ou nuptial, que l'eau sainte l'asperge
Sous le noir crucifix ou le rameau bénit,
C'est là que tout commence et là que tout finit,
De la première aurore au feu du dernier cierge.

Humble, rustique et clos, ou fier du pavillon
Triomphalement peint d'or et de vermillon,
Qu'il soit de chêne brut, de cyprès ou d'érable;

Heureux qui peut dormir sans peur et sans remords
Dans le lit paternel, massif et vénérable,
Où tous les siens sont nés aussi bien qu'ils sont morts.

STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ

1842-1898

He belonged to an old family of civil servants; was born in Paris, educated at a private school in the suburbs and then at the Lycée de Sens, and, after some stay in England, was received into the teaching body of the French University and lectured on our language and literature for thirty years as a public-school master, first in the provinces and, from the early 'seventies onwards, in Paris. Adhering to the group of writers who chose Leconte de Lisle for their chief, he contributed in verse to *Le Parnasse Contemporain* (1864, 1869), and in prose to several reviews; had the lion's share in the production of *La Dernière Mode* (1875), a curious short-lived journal of domestic taste; translated Poe's *Raven* about the same time—and later many others of his poems—into French prose, and recovered and reprinted, in 1876, the French, which is the original, edition of Beckford's *Vathek*. In the same year appeared *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*, suggested by Banville and intended for recitation by the elder Coquelin: this and the unfinished *Hérodiade* are Mallarmé's most considerable poems. An expensive volume of his poetry was first published in 1887; a volume of miscellaneous prose called simply *Pages* appeared at Brussels in 1890, and at Brussels also, in 1892, an essay—originally a lecture—on Villiers de L'Isle-Adam. The prose volume *Divagations* (Paris, 1897), which contains, with less valuable matter, the essential formulas of his poetical theory, is the only other book of Mallarmé's which need be mentioned here.

His life was modest, dignified and singularly uneventful; but his friendships and the intellectual influence he shed through them belong to the recent history of ideas in France. In his youth, at Avignon, he was in close contact with the Félibriges of Provence; later, in Paris, he frequented the house of Victor Hugo, and all the Parnassians were his intimates, especially the great seceders Villiers and Verlaine, while he was on familiar terms with the leaders of new tendencies in painting, Manet and Whistler and Renoir, as well as the Belgian draughtsman Félicien Rops. But it was a younger generation which set the greatest store by the grace and wisdom of his talk. His rooms in the Rue de Rome were, for two or three lustres, a centre of eager intellectual life. Having retired, on a well-earned pension, to

the neighbourhood of Fontainebleau, he was finishing the poem *Hérodiade* when his last illness seized him. It was not long since, upon the death of Verlaine, the young writers of Paris had publicly hailed him 'the Prince of poets.'

The poetry of Mallarmé, which remained to the last almost severely Parnassian in form, offers in its meagreness the most complete examples of a Symbolism which, in its exclusive care to repeat the authentic modulation of ideas, disdains the help of images sufficiently developed to impose their significance. In other hands, the movement (of which he is perhaps the most convinced theorist) was pre-eminently a revival of sentiment: it was his originality to 'aim at the head.' Few poets, probably, have made more difficult verses with more difficulty. The absence of punctuation, the strangeness of a summary dislocated syntax which seems always to chafe at the necessity of presenting simultaneous impressions successively, are only superficial obstacles: but not every one can endure the rarer ether of an art so purely suggestive. 'Instituer une relation entre les images, exacte, et que s'en détache un tiers aspect fusible et clair présenté à la divination'—thus his own words define Mallarmé's poetic. His poems, variations on a theme withheld, a series of superfetations engendered by a secret logic, intrust to the flash of chance analogies instantly eclipsed the illumination of a principal thought—of an elementary and universal order—which patience and ingenuity may discover at the twentieth reading. It is often worth while, for the sake of the chaste, discreet and generous emotion which glistens at the bottom of the well. And if the interior music is all of tones unresolved, that which every one may hear is frequently delicious in its fluidity and many definitive and even sumptuous phrases emerge.

Of the two long poems, *Hérodiade*, which Mr. Arthur Symons has daringly translated, is a stately fragment; in the relatively limpid *Après-midi d'un Faune*, which inspired the symbolist composer M. Claude Debussy so happily, may be best seen the temper of his wistful and aristocratic imagination and in what company he loved to take refuge.

Mallarmé's prose, less tense and more expansive in the verbal simulation of easy gestures, is the prose of a man who had read everything, reflected deeply, endured life and hated action.

La chair est triste, hélas ! et j'ai lu tous les livres . . .

Les Poésies de Stéphane Mallarmé (frontispiece de F. Rops). Brussels: Deman, 1899.

Prose et vers (the best of his writings collected in one volume). Paris: Perrin.

Divagations (in prose). Paris: 1897.

Poésies Complètes, a facsimile reproduction of the manuscript, was published in Brussels and is long since out of print.

M. Albert Mockel's masterly study of Stéphane Mallarmé, *Un Héros*, may be recommended.

CI

Les Fenêtres

Las du triste hôpital et de l'encens fétide
Qui monte en la blancheur banale des rideaux
Vers le grand crucifix ennuyé du mur vide,
Le moribond sournois y redresse un vieux dos,

Se traîne et va, moins pour chauffer sa pourriture
Que pour voir du soleil sur les pierres, coller
Les poils blancs et les os de la maigre figure
Aux fenêtres qu'un beau rayon clair veut hâler,

Et la bouche, fiévreuse et d'azur bleu vorace,
Telle, jeune, elle alla respirer son trésor,
Une peau virginale et de jadis! encrasse
D'un long baiser amer les tièdes carreaux d'or.

Ivre, il vit, oubliant l'horreur des saintes huiles,
Les tisanes, l'horloge et le lit infligé,
La toux; et quand le soir saigne parmi les tuiles,
Son œil, à l'horizon de lumière gorgé,

Voit des galères d'or, belles comme des cygnes,
Sur un fleuve de pourpre et de parfums dormir
En berçant l'éclair fauve et riche de leurs lignes
Dans un grand nonchaloir chargé de souvenir!

Ainsi, pris du dégoût de l'homme à l'âme dure
Vautré dans le bonheur, où ses seuls appétits
Mangent, et qui s'entête à chercher cette ordure
Pour l'offrir à la femme allaitant ses petits,

Je fuis et je m'accroche à toutes les croisées
D'où l'on tourne l'épaule à la vie, et, béni,
Dans leur verre, lavé d'éternelles rosées,
Que dore le matin chaste de l'Infini

Je me mire et me vois ange ! et je meurs, et j'aime
—Que la vitre soit l'art, soit la mysticité—
A renaître, portant mon rêve en diadème,
Au ciel antérieur où fleurit la Beauté.

Mais, hélas ! Ici-bas est maître : sa hantise
Vient m'écœurer parfois jusqu'en cet abri sûr
Et le vomissement impur de la Bêtise
Me force à me boucher le nez devant l'azur.

Est-il moyen, ô Moi qui connais l'amertume,
D'enfoncer le cristal par le monstre insulté
Et de m'enfuir, avec mes deux ailes sans plume
—Au risque de tomber pendant l'éternité ?

CII

SONNET

Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui
Va-t-il nous déchirer avec un coup d'aile ivre
Ce lac dur oublié que hante sous le givre
Le transparent glacier des vols qui n'ont pas fui !

Un cygne d'autrefois se souvient que c'est lui
Magnifique mais qui sans espoir se délivre
Pour n'avoir pas chanté la région où vivre
Quand du stérile hiver a resplendi l'ennui.

Tout son col secouera cette blanche agonie
Par l'espace infligée à l'oiseau qui le nie,
Mais non l'horreur du sol où le plumage est pris.

Fantôme qu'à ce lieu son pur éclat assigne,
Il s'immobilise au songe froid de mépris
Que vêt parmi l'exil inutile le Cygne.

JEAN RICHEPIN

1849

M. Richepin, whose father was an army surgeon, was born at Médéa in Algeria. He was a brilliant schoolboy and, in 1868, entered the École Normale in Paris, the gateway to a successful scholastic career for which, however, an undisciplined temperament soon showed him unfitted. In the war he served with the irregular levies, became a journalist in 1871, and two years later was associated both as author and actor with an obscure theatre. The book of lyrical poetry which is still the most famous of his writings, *La Chanson des Gueux*, appeared in 1876 and caused considerable scandal. The author had indulged the taste for a wandering life long enough to guarantee the faithfulness of his pictures from the world of outcasts: his curiosity to know more of it easily survived a short term of imprisonment which rewarded the extreme frankness of his style, and he became successively a seaman, a dock labourer, a travelling tinker—and poetry lost nothing by these experiences. The violent collection called *Les Blasphèmes* (1884) and *La Mer* (1886) confirmed his reputation as a poet of original, if unchastened, talent. He had made a name as a novelist also with *La Glu* (1881) and a volume of queer studies, *Le Pavé* (1883). A drama, *Par le Glaive*, made its mark in 1892, and *Le Chemineau*, played at the Odéon in 1897, was almost popular: other plays, *La Martyre*, *La Gitane* (in prose), *Les Truands*, have added nothing to his celebrity; nor indeed have his later lyrical volumes, *Mes Paradis* (1894), *La Bombarde* (1899). He was elected to the French Academy in 1908.

Jean Richepin's is a curious figure among French poets of the day. A verbal fecundity which may almost be called verbal incontinence, a systematic unreason, the inadequacy of his psychological instinct, the continuous violence of his tone, belong to a belated, an impenitent Romanticism; while he possesses all the Parnassian craftsmanship, the Parnassian sureness in registering sensations, a sense of the prestige of syllables and of their emotional capacity which indeed sometimes degenerates into sheer verbalism. If nine-tenths of his 'realism' is the abuse of dialect and slang, he certainly knows the submerged classes and feels for them, and has conscientiously striven to make their joys and their revolts articulate—and picturesque. As

Coppée is the poet of the resigned poor, so M. Richepin's far richer gifts have been devoted to poverty insurgent. Walt Whitman was called 'the tramp in literature': this is a tramp who knows Greek, an Ishmael whose complete sincerity is compatible with an absorbing passion for splendid sounds and dazzling visions.

CIII

Le Dernier Océan

Pour immense qu'il soit, l'Océan diminue.
Car la force par quoi notre globe a durci,
Lente et sûre, le fait se contracter aussi,
Pendant qu'il s'évapore en brumes vers la nue.

A toujours s'exhaler son âme s'exténue,
Et son corps se condense à la longue épaissi.
Jadis ce vert manteau couvrait tout, et voici
Que bientôt l'on verra la Terre à moitié nue.

Puis viendra l'heure où vieille, édentée et sans crins,
Elle n'en aura plus qu'un haillon sur les reins,
Un lambeau d'Océan, lourd, gras, frangé de crasse;

Et dans le sale ourlet de ce pagne visqueux
Grouilleront les derniers survivants de ma race
Comme des poux collés à la loque d'un gueux.

[*La Mer.*

CIV

Regard de Pauvre

Le vieux à gueule de bandit
M'a regardé, ne m'a rien dit,

Ni l'humble appel qui rend humain,
Quand, brusque, il a tendu la main,

Ni même un merci chuchoté
En recevant ma charité.

Mais ses yeux de loup, ses yeux gris,
M'ont parlé, certe; et j'ai compris.

Ils disaient : ' Crois-tu, pour deux sous,
' M'avoir à tes pieds et dessous ? '

Ils disaient : ' C'est, en vérité,
' Toi qui te fais la charité.'

Ils disaient : ' En me les jetant,
' Ces deux sous, toi seul es content.'

Ils disaient : ' De donner ainsi,
' C'est toi qui te dois un merci.'

Ils disaient : ' Deux sous au barbon !
' Et l'on est tout fier d'être bon ! '

Ils disaient : ' Pour toi quel régal,
' D'avilir en moi ton égal ! '

Ils disaient : ' Tes deux sous reçus,
' J'aurais droit de cracher dessus.'

Ils disaient : ' Soit ! je prends le don ;
' Mais n'espère pas mon pardon.'

Ainsi, sans un mot, par ses yeux,
M'a parlé le silencieux.

Et moi non plus je n'ai rien dit
Au vieux à gueule de bandit.

J'ai mis d'autres sous dans ma main
Et, vite, ai repris mon chemin,

Fuyard honteux songeant tout bas
Qu'il n'avait pas tort, n'est-ce pas ?

[*La Bombarde.*

ÉMILE VERHAEREN

1855

THE most striking figure among living French poets, and the most eminent, along with Maurice Maeterlinck, of those modern authors who feel in Flemish and write in French, belongs by birth to the Waesland, the fertile district which lies between Ghent and Antwerp. He was educated at Brussels, Ghent and Louvain, and called to the Brussels bar. He does not seem to have practised, but spent some years in a lusty intellectual vagabondage, of which the first-fruits, a volume of lyrics, saw the light in 1883. About the same time he began also to contribute critical articles to various 'young' reviews, both Belgian and French. A period of bodily and mental suffering, which ensued upon an interval of rigidly ascetic ruralising, considerably affected the governing inspiration of his poetry, if it did not permanently modify the deep characteristics of a talent which a dozen volumes of memorable verse have since illustrated. Besides these and several monographs on modern artists, chiefly impressionists, M. Verhaeren has written lyrical dramas, and two of them—*Le Cloître* (1900) and *Philippe Deux* (1903)—have been played, with no particular success. He has travelled much, especially in Spain and England; and resides in Paris and Brussels alternately.

A violently personal poet for whom the world is rich in emblems and who has consistently sought to express himself by imposing his visions and his rhythms, who riots in furnaces of colour and whose emphatic accents betray the tribune born, might be called a Romantic or a Symbolist with almost equal propriety: but M. Verhaeren deserves better than to be identified with any school. He found his bent gradually, passing from the crudest pictures of an exuberant countryside to the faithful record of those desolate nights and days when pain took visible shape and a fevered pulse made reproachful music in a sick brain; and for a time his fame rested on the skill with which he reproduced those obsessions: but it is a genius of health that opened his windows upon a busy world and gave him the function among poets of our time of glorifying the intensity of modern life in its common manifestations. He has exalted the daily tumult of streets, the allegorical significance of humble trades, the poetry of machines

and the teeming highroad of the seas, the personality of crowds and the self-sacrifice of pioneers. On this side his work approaches Walt Whitman's as an expression of democratic energy and hope. It may be added that of late the meliorist in him, and the champion of what may perhaps bear the name of a pantheistic positivism, has been sometimes oppressively conspicuous in gnomic sentences and prophecies and loud denunciation. But M. Verhaeren is also the poet of Flemish hearths and familiar joys; he has met heroes and spectres —S. George and the North Wind—on the roads; he is saturated with the history and the legends of his country and penetrated with the still and sullen beauty of its landscape. He endows the elements and the virtues with a vehement humanity; and, like Browning, he is more dramatic in his lyrics than in his drama.

There is more force than perfection in this poetry. M. Verhaeren's verbal opulence and extreme vigour do not exclude a sort of clumsiness in the expression, a want of variety, of suppleness and of measure. As a versifier, though he continually returns to the orthodoxy of his nonage, his characteristic form is the *vers libéré*, polymetric, recognising no judge but the ear and, in spite of certain irregularities, never leaving the ear in doubt as to the metrical intention. He uses, and even abuses, internal rime, internal assonance and alliteration. And, it may well be by an atavistic instinct inherited from a speech more heavily stressed than French, he is given to reinforcing his rhythm by surrounding the strong syllables with enclitics which exaggerate their weight by contrast.

Poèmes, i^e^, ii^e^, iii^e^ séries; *Almanach* (1895); *Les Campagnes hallucinées* (1893); *les Villes Tentaculaires* (1895); *Les Visages de la Vie* (1899); *Les Heures claires; Les Forces tumultueuses* (1902); *La Multiple Splendeur* (1906); *Les Aubes* [this lyrical drama has been translated by Mr. Arthur Symons]; *Le Cloître*; *Philippe II.*

In prose: *Contes de Minuit.*

All these works are published by the Société du *Mercure de France.* The following books of poetry are published by M. Edmond Deman, Brussels:—*Petites Légendes* (1900); *Les Heures d'Après-midi; Toute la Flandre* (*Les Tendresses premières*, 1904; *La Guirlande des Dunes*, 1907; *Les Héros*, 1908).

CV

Le Glaive

Quelqu'un m'avait prédit, qui tenait une épée,
Et qui riait de mon orgueil stérilisé :
Tu seras nul, et pour ton âme inoccupée
L'avenir ne sera que regret du passé.

Ton corps, où s'est aigri le sang de purs ancêtres,
Fragile et lourd, se cassera dans chaque effort ;
Tu seras le fiévreux ployé, sur les fenêtres,
D'où l'on peut voir bondir la vie et ses chars d'or.

Tes nerfs t'enlaceront de leurs fibres sans sèves,
Tes nerfs !—et tes ongles s'amolliront d'ennui ;
Ton front comme un tombeau dominera tes rêves
Et sera ta frayeur, en des miroirs, la nuit.

Te fuir !—si tu pouvais ! mais non, la lassitude
Des autres et de toi t'aura voûté le dos
Si bien, rivé les pieds si fort, que l'hébétude
Détrônera ta tête et plombera tes os.

Éclatants et claquants, les drapeaux vers les luttes,
Ta lèvre exsangue hélas ! jamais ne les mordra :
Usé, ton cœur, ton morne cœur, dans les disputes
Des vieux textes, où l'on taille comme en un drap.

Tu t'en iras à part et seul—et les naguères
De jeunesse seront un inutile aimant
Pour les grands yeux lointains—et les joyeux tonnerres
Chargeront loin de toi, victorieusement !

[*Les Débâcles.*

CVI

Au Nord

Deux vieux marins des mers du Nord
S'en revenaient, un soir d'automne,
De la Sicile et de ses îles mensongères,
Avec un peuple de Sirènes
A bord.

Aigus d'orgueil, ils regagnaient leur fiord,
Parmi les brumes mensongères,
Aigus d'orgueil ils regagnaient le Nord
Sous un vent morne et monotone,
Un soir de tristesse et d'automne.

De la rive, les gens du port
Les regardaient, sans faire un signe :
Aux cordages, le long des mâts,
Les Sirènes, couvertes d'or,
Mordaient, comme des vignes,
Les lignes
Sinueuses de leurs corps.

Les gens se regardaient, ne sachant pas
Ce qui venait de l'océan, là-bas,
Malgré les brumes,
Le navire semblait comme un panier d'argent
Rempli de chair, de fruits et d'or bougeant
Qui s'avançait, porté sur des ailes d'écume.

Les Sirènes chantaient
Dans les cordages du navire ;
Les bras tendus en lyres,
Les seins levés comme des feux ;
Les Sirènes chantaient
Devant le soir houleux,
Qui fauchait sur la mer les lumières diurnes ;
Les Sirènes chantaient,
Le corps crispé autour des mâts,
Mais les hommes du port, frustes et taciturnes,
Ne les entendaient pas.

Ils ne reconnurent ni leurs amis
—Les deux marins—ni le navire de leur pays,
Ni le foc, ni les voiles
Dont ils avaient cousu la toile ;
Ils ne comprirent rien à ce grand songe
Qui enchantait la mer de ses voyages,
Puisqu'il n'était pas le même mensonge
Qu'on enseignait, dans leur village ;

Et le navire auprès du bord
Passa, les alléchant vers sa merveille,
Sans que personne, entre les treilles,
Ne recueillît les fruits de chair et d'or.

[*Les Vignes de ma Muraille.*

CVII

Le Bazar

C'est un bazar, au bout des faubourgs rouges:
Étalages bondés, éventaires ventrus,
Tumulte et cris brandis, gestes bourrus et crus,
Et lettres d'or qui soudain bougent,
En torsades, sur la façade.

Chaque matin, on vend, en ce bazar,
Parmi les épices, les fards
Et les drogues omnipotentes,
A bon marché, pour quelques sous,
Les diamants dissous
De la rosée immense et éclatante.

Le soir, à prix numéroté,
Avec le désir noir de trafiquer de la pureté,
On y brocante le soleil
Que toutes les vagues de la mer claire
Lavent, entre leurs doigts vermeils,
Aux horizons auréolaires.

C'est un bazar, avec des murs géants
Et des balcons et des sous-sols béants
Et des tympans montés sur des corniches
Et des drapeaux et des affiches,
Où deux clowns noirs plument un ange.

A travers boue, à travers fange,
Roulent, la nuit, vers le bazar,
Les chars, les camions et les fardiers,
Qui s'en reviennent des usines
Voisines,

Des cimetières et des charmiers,
Avec un tel poids noir de cargaisons,
Que le sol bouge et les maisons.

On met au clair à certains jours,
En de vaines et frivoles boutiques,
Ce que l'humanité des temps antiques
Croyait sincèrement être l'amour ;
Aussi les Dieux et leur beauté
Et l'effrayant aspect de leur éternité
Et leurs yeux d'or et leurs mythes et leurs emblèmes
Et des livres qui les blasphèment.

Toutes ardeurs, tous souvenirs, toutes prières
Sont là, sur des étals, et s'empoussièrent.
Des mots qui renfermaient l'âme du monde
Et que les poètes seuls disaient au nom de tous,
Sont charriés et ballottés, dans la faconde
Des camelots et des voyous.
L'immensité se serre en des armoires
Dérisoires et rayonne de plaies
Et le sens même de la gloire
Se définit par des monnaies.

Lettres jusques au ciel, lettres en or qui bouge,
C'est un bazar au bout des faubourgs rouges !
La foule et ses flots noirs
S'y bouscule près des comptoirs ;
La foule et ses désirs, multipliés,
Par centaines et par milliers,
Y tourne, y monte, au long des escaliers,
Et s'érige folle et sauvage,
En spirale, vers les étages.

Là-haut, c'est la pensée
Immortelle, mais convulsée,
Avec ses triomphes et ses surprises,
Qu'à la hâte on expertise.
Tous ceux dont le cerveau
S'enflamme aux feux des problèmes nouveaux,

Tous les chercheurs qui se fixent pour cible
Le front d'airain de l'impossible
Et le cassent, pour que les découvertes
S'en échappent, ailes ouvertes,
Sont là gauches, fiévreux, distraits,
Dupes des gens qui les renient
Mais utilisent leur génie,
Et font argent de leurs secrets.

Oh ! les Édens, là-bas, au bout du monde,
Avec des arbres purs à leurs sommets,
Que ces voyants des lois profondes
Ont exploré pour à jamais,
Sans se douter qu'ils sont les Dieux.
Oh ! leur ardeur à recréer la vie,
Selon la foi qu'ils ont en eux
Et la douceur et la bonté de leurs grands yeux,
Quand, revenus de l'inconnu
Vers les hommes, d'où ils s'érigent,
On leur vole ce qui leur reste aux mains
De vérité conquise et de destin.

C'est un bazar tout en vertiges
Que bat, continûment, la foule, avec ses houles
Et ses vagues d'argent et d'or ;
C'est un bazar tout en décors,
Avec des tours de feux et des lumières,
Si large et haut que, dans la nuit,
Il apparaît la bête éclatante de bruit
Qui monte épouvanter le silence stellaire.

[*Les Villes Tentaculaires.*

CVIII

Celui qui me lira, dans les siècles, un soir,
Troublant mes vers, sous leur sommeil ou sous leur cendre
Et ranimant leurs sens lointain pour mieux comprendre
Comment ceux d'aujourd'hui s'étaient armés d'espoir,

Qu'il sache, avec quel violent élan, ma joie
S'est, à travers les cris, les révoltes, les pleurs,
Ruée au combat fier et mâle des douleurs,
Pour en tirer l'amour, comme on conquiert sa proie.

J'aime mes yeux fiévreux, ma cervelle, mes nerfs,
Le sang dont vit mon cœur, le cœur dont vit mon torse ;
J'aime l'homme et le monde et j'adore la force
Que donne et prend ma force à l'homme et l'univers.

Car vivre, c'est prendre et donner avec liesse.
Mes pairs, ce sont ceux-là qui s'exaltent autant
Que je me sens moi-même avide et haletant
Devant la vie intense et sa rouge sagesse.

Heures de chute ou de grandeur !—tout se confond
Et se transforme en ce brasier qu'est l'existence ;
Seul importe que le désir reste en partance,
Jusqu'à la mort, devant l'éveil des horizons.

Celui qui trouve est un cerveau qui communie
Avec la fourmillante et large humanité.
L'esprit plonge et s'enivre en pleine immensité ;
Il faut aimer, pour découvrir avec génie.

Une tendresse énorme emplit l'âpre savoir,
Il exalte la force et la beauté des mondes,
Il devine les liens et les causes profondes ;
O vous qui me lirez, dans les siècles, un soir,

Comprenez-vous pourquoi mon vers vous interpelle ?
C'est qu'en vos temps quelqu'un d'ardent aura tiré
Du cœur de la nécessité même, le vrai,
Bloc clair, pour y dresser l'entente universelle.

[*Les Forces Tumultueuses.*

CIX

LES TOURS AU BORD DE LA MER

Veuves debout au long des mers
Les tours de Lisweghe et de Furnes
Pleurent, aux vents des vieux hivers
Et des automnes taciturnes.

Elles règnent sur le pays,
Depuis quels jours, depuis quels âges,
Depuis quels temps évanouis
Avec les brumes de leurs plages?

Jadis, on allumait des feux
Sur leur sommet, dans le soir sombre;
Et le marin fixait ses yeux
Vers ce flambeau tendu dans l'ombre.

Quand la guerre battait l'Escaut
De son tumulte militaire,
Les tours semblaient darder, là-haut,
La rage en flamme de la terre.

Quand on tuait de ferme en bouge,
Pêle-mêle, vieux et petits,
Les tours jetaient leurs gestes rouges,
En suppliques, vers l'infini.

Depuis,
La guerre,
Au bruit roulant de ses tonnerres,
Crispe, sous d'autres cieux, son poing ensanglanté:
Et d'autres blocs et d'autres phares,
Armés de grands yeux d'or et de cristaux bizarres,
Jettent, vers d'autres flots, de plus nettes clartés.

Mais vous êtes, quand même,
Debout encore, au long des mers,
Debout dans l'ombre et dans l'hiver,
Sans couronne, sans diadème,
Sans feux épars sur vos fronts lourds;
Et vous demeurez là, seules au vent nocturne,
Vous, les tours, les tours gigantesques, les tours
De Nieuport, de Lisweghe et de Furnes.

Sur les villes et les hameaux,
Au-dessus des maisons vieilles et basses,
Vous carrez votre masse,
Tragiquement;

Et ceux qui vont, au soir tombant, le long des grèves,
A voir votre grandeur et votre deuil,
Sentent toujours, comme un afflux d'orgueil
Battre leur rêve :
Et leur cœur chante et leur cœur pleure, et leur cœur bout
D'être jaillis du même sol que vous.

Flandre tenace au cœur ; Flandre des aïeux morts
Avec la terre aimée entre leurs dents ardentes ;
Pays de fruste orgueil ou de rage mordante,
Dès qu'on barre ta vie, ou qu'on touche à ton sort ;
Pays de labours verts autour de blancs villages ;
Pays de poings boudeurs et de fronts redoutés ;
Pays de patiente et sourde volonté ;
Pays de fête rouge ou de pâle silence ;
Clos de tranquillité ou champs de violence,
Tu te dardes dans tes beffrois et dans tes tours,
Comme en un cri géant vers l'inconnu des jours !
Chaque brique, chaque moellon ou chaque pierre,
Renferme un peu de ta douleur héréditaire
Ou de ta joie éparse aux âges de grandeur ;
Tours de longs deuils passés ou beffrois de splendeur,
Vous êtes des témoins dont nul ne se délivre ;
Votre ombre est là, sur mes pensers et sur mes livres,
Sur mes gestes nouant ma vie avec sa mort.
O que mon cœur toujours reste avec vous d'accord !
Qu'il puise en vous l'orgueil et la fermeté haute,
Tours debout près des flots, tours debout près des côtes,
Et que tous ceux qui s'en viennent des pays clairs
Que brûle le soleil, à l'autre bout des mers,
Sachent, rien qu'en longeant nos grèves taciturnes,
Rien qu'en posant le pied sur notre sol glacé,
Quel vieux peuple rugueux vous leur symbolisez,
Vous les tours de Nieuport, de Lisweghe et de Furnes !

[*La Guirlande des Dunes.*

JEAN MORÉAS

1856

M. Moréas, whose real name is Papadiamantopoulos, is a Greek and breathed the air of Attica in his childhood. His education was cosmopolitan, and it was after seeing something of the south of France and Italy, Genoa and several German cities that in 1872 he spent six weeks in Paris—enough to feel its fascination and to choose it for the home of his intelligence. Some years later he became in fact a Parisian, and began to rime in reviews of the Latin Quarter. His first book, *Les Syrtes*, appeared at the end of 1884 (before Symbolism was a movement) and was well received by a very limited public; *Les Cantilènes* followed; he collaborated with M. Paul Adam in a couple of novels, and at the same time vigorously defended in pamphlets and letters his own conception of his art. With *Le Pèlerin Passionné* (the title recalls the famous Elizabethan miscellany) his renown grew considerable, and Verlaine himself is said to have avowed some jealousy of the younger poet, who owed a good deal, however, to his example. Progressively, M. Moréas has since shown, with *Sylves*, *Ériphyle*, *Les Stances* (1899-1902), how little the authenticity of his talent depends upon strange words and misty allegories: to the charm of syllables he has added in recent works a suave felicity, clearness, amplitude, and the dignity of grave emotions. *Iphigénie*, his latest production, is a noble paraphrase, well worthy of the unique accident which connects the race of Euripides with the language of Racine. It was performed first at Orange in the Ancient Theatre, and afterwards at the Paris Odéon. Its author has hardly left Paris, or at least France, since he first settled there, except to visit his country at the time of the Greco-Turkish war.

Jean Moréas has an abnormally sensitive ear, and his symbolism has been perhaps above all else a feast of sonorous memories. By diligent reading of the elder poets he has amassed a treasure of verbal associations, and he has learned the secret resources of his adopted language by donning the habit of successive periods. He has echoed, without quite stifling a curiously modern tone in his often delicious experiments, the sumptuous and nugatory love-songs of the thirteenth century, the piercing cry of Villon, the noble languor of the Pleiad

(the derivative sect called *l'école romane* sprang from this stage in his pilgrimage), and in later collections he has seemed to correct Ronsard's superb pedantry by the file of Malherbe, or to verify the descent of Chénier, through Racine, from the lover of Helen and Cassandra. The prefaces and polemics of M. Moréas have professed to base upon historical grounds the plea for a more thorough relaxation of the bands of French prosody: but his practice, some incidental 'Whitmanisms' apart, has tended more and more to conformity.

Jean Moréas is emphatically a literary poet: it is easier, that is, to characterise his instructed predilections than his original significance. It remains to be seen whether he will succeed in delivering a personality which is possibly vigorous from the nemesis of his triumphant assimilations.

The earlier verse was published by L. Vanier; *Ériphyle* (1894) by the 'Bibliothèque artistique et littéraire'; in 1898 the same publishers reissued his collective *Poésies* (1886-1896); *Les Stances* is published by *La Plume* (1901); *Iphigénie* by the Société du *Mercure de France.*

CX

ÉLÉGIE

Plus durement que trait turquois,
Amour, plaisant doux archer, blesse
Rustiques garçons et grands rois.

Par telle langueur et faiblesse,
Dieu oublia et diffame eut
David qui haïssait mollesse.

Semblablement l'autre qui fut
Salomon, si très sage augure,
De grand renom piteux déchut.

Bouche feinte et feinte figure,
Yeux bénins aux gracieux lacs
Honte cèlent et mal'mort dure:

Agememnon n'en eut soulas,
Aussi, la forcenée Hélène
Le fit voir au duc Ménélas.

Achille servit Polyxène;
Chez la lydienne Herculus
Fila quenouillette aime-laine.

De Stratonice, Sélecus
Souffrit empire et vasselage,
De Chryséide, Troïlus.

Au gré d'un coloré visage
N'écouta les buccins retors
Antoine, preux trop plus que sage.

Et tout docte, en nonchaloir fors,
De sa Faustine, Marc Aurèle
Vit de cendre ses lauriers ords.

Ainsi, en la bailli' de celle
Dont les cheveux passent l'or fin
(Las! qui m'est félone et cruelle),

Je cuide le Permesse vain,
Et mon souffle n'a véhémence
D'animer le roseau divin

Qui clamait mon nom par la France.

[*Le Pèlerin passionné*; Jonchée.

CXI

STANCES

Tu souffres tous les maux et tu ne fais que rire
De ton lâche destin;
Tu ne sais pas pourquoi tu chantes sur ta lyre
Du soir jusqu'au matin.

Poète, un grave auteur dira que tu t'amuses
Sans trop d'utilité;
Va, ne l'écoute point: Apollon et les Muses
Ont bien quelque beauté.

Laisse les uns mourir et vois les autres naître,
Les bons ou les méchants,
Puisque tout ici-bas ne survient que pour être
Un pretexte à tes chants.

[*Les Stances*, iv. 8.

CXII

Je vous entends glisser avec un secret bruit
Là-bas sur la pénombre verte.
Entrez dans ma maison, ô souffles de la nuit,
J'ai laissé la fenêtre ouverte!

O souffles, pour mon cœur tout chargés à présent
D'erreur, de remords, d'amertume,
Vous me parliez jadis lorsqu'avec le brisant
Luttaient la tempête et l'écume,

Lorsque le long du sable aux flots harmonieux,
Dans la crique et sur cette grève,
D'une amitié perfide et la terre et les cieux
Remplissaient mon âme et mon rêve.

Mais quoi! vous vous taisez, esprits éoliens!
Un autre arpège se prolonge:
C'est la pluie, elle tombe et je me ressouviens
Tout à coup d'un autre mensonge.

[*Les Stances*, vi. 5.

JULES LAFORGUE

1860-1887

Laforgue was born at Montevideo, brought up at Tarbes, and finished his education in Paris, where (being one of a large family with small means) he was thrown upon his own resources very early. He read enormously—philosophy and science as well as literature—wrote much both prose and verse, got in touch through friends (MM. Paul Bourget and Téodor de Wyzewa among them) with several of the 'young' periodicals, and had attracted the notice of some influential men of letters when the post of French reader to the Empress Augusta was offered him. He lived four years in Germany and left Berlin finally in 1886 to marry a young Englishwoman whom he had met there; but he had hardly settled again in Paris with brilliant literary prospects and published his first volume, when his lungs were found to be affected and he was ordered to the South. The disease was however too far advanced already, and he died in Paris within two days of his twenty-seventh birthday.

French literature lost in Jules Laforgue a writer disconcertingly original, of exuberant and apparently universal talent, whose influence upon his contemporaries and successors, if not altogether fruitful, has at all events been penetrating. There are admirable pages in his prose writings—in *Les Moralités Légendaires*, those creative parodies, and in his singularly luminous reflexions upon modern art. He was himself, if one word could define him, the most complete of impressionists. In French poetry he inaugurated something more than a new manner. All the verse he made after he reached manhood, though it wears an unmistakable air of sovereign facility, is cynically uncouth, not through haste nor want of practice, but in obedience to certain conceptions of his art which possibly he would have modified with time. If Verlaine is unapproachably natural, Laforgue—who proceeded solely by allusion—was not afraid to be grotesque in the scrupulous effort to echo the very rustle of the wings of thought. But also his undress served the ends of a new irony, gay and glacial, inexorable and infantile, based on the obsession of our nothingness, which lisps the cruellest syllables and veils a shamefast sensibility.

His letters, which have been published, reveal a valiant and lovable character.

The literary remains of Jules Laforgue, all too heavily conditioned by their metaphysical postulates, have perhaps been overrated by the leaders of his generation : but so brilliant a prelude justified all manner of conjectures and the most durable regrets.

Poésies (*Le Sanglot de la Terre*, *Les Complaintes*, *L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune*, *Le Concile feérique*, *Des Fleurs de bonne volonté*, *Derniers Vers*) ; *Moralités Légendaires* ; *Mélanges Posthumes*. These three volumes are all published by the Société du *Mercure de France*, as well as M. Camille Mauclair's remarkable monograph on Jules Laforgue.

CXIII

COMPLAINTE

De l'Oubli des Morts

Mesdames et Messieurs,
Vous dont la mère est morte,
C'est le bon fossoyeux
Qui gratte à votre porte.

Les morts
C'est sous terre ;
Ça n'en sort
Guère.

Vous fumez dans vos bocks,
Vous soldez quelque idylle,
Là-bas chante le coq :
Pauvres morts hors des villes !

Grand-papa se penchait,
Là, le doigt sur la tempe,
Sœur faisait du crochet,
Mère montait la lampe.

Les morts
C'est discret,
Ça dort
Trop au frais.

Vous avez bien dîné :
Comment va cette affaire ?
Ah ! les petits morts-nés
Ne se dorlotent guère !

Notez, d'un trait égal,
  Au livre de la caisse,
Entre deux frais de bal :
Entretien tombe et messe.

  C'est gai,
Cette vie ;
Hein, ma mie,
  O gué ?

Mesdames et Messieurs,
Vous dont la sœur est morte,
Ouvrez au fossoyeux
Qui claque à votre porte ;

Si vous n'avez pitié
Il viendra (sans rancune)
Vous tirer par les pieds,
Une nuit de grand' lune !

  Importun
Vent qui rage !
Les défunts ?
Ça voyage . . .

[*Les Complaintes.*

CXIV

DIALOGUE

Avant le lever de la Lune

— Je veux bien vivre ; mais vraiment,
L'Idéal est trop élastique.

— C'est l'Idéal, son nom l'implique,
Hors son non-sens, le verbe ment.

— Mais, tout est conteste ; les livres
S'accouchent, s'entretuent sans lois !

— Certes ! l'Absolu perd ses droits,
Là, où le Vrai consiste à vivre.

— Et, si j'amène pavillon
Et repasse au Néant ma charge ?

— L'Infini, qui souffle du large,
Dit : ' Pas de bêtises, voyons ! '

— Ces chantiers du Possible ululent
A l'Inconcevable, pourtant !

— Un degré, comme il en est tant
Entre l'aube et le crépuscule.

— Être actuel, est-ce, du moins,
Être adéquat à Quelque Chose ?

— Conséquemment, comme la rose
Est nécessaire à ses besoins.

— Façon de dire peu commune
Que Tout est cercles vicieux ?

— Vicieux, mais Tout !
— J'aime mieux
Donc m'en aller selon la Lune.

[*L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune.*

HENRI DE RÉGNIER

1864

Born at Honfleur and educated in Paris at the Collège Stanislas and at the Law School, M. de Régnier contributed his first published verses to *Lutèce* in 1885, about the time when the other fuglemen of the new schools were beginning to feel their way in various French and Belgian periodicals more or less short-lived. He was in those days assiduous at Leconte de Lisle's receptions, but the Parnassian seceders Verlaine and Mallarmé attracted him, and their influence is manifest in his *juvenilia*. The more personal and accomplished verse he made in the early 'nineties was appreciated by the small public of young poets, but his name had hardly travelled outside a group when his dramatic poem *La Gardienne* was presented without success at the Théâtre de l'Œuvre in 1894. Since that date M. de Régnier has rapidly gained the esteem of all who are curious about new directions in French poetry, and there is no native name so widely considered among poets of his generation. It is quite likely that his success owes something to a versatility real enough to cause a little misgiving: for poetry is a jealous art; and he has taken rank as a writer of fiction with *Le Trèfle Blanc* and *La double Maîtresse* and *Le Mariage de Minuit*—works which reveal not only a sympathetic student of the eighteenth century and an amiable if disenchanted observer of contemporary 'society,' but a subtle analyst of moods, a master of transitions and of a prose sonorous, engaging and pervaded by a discreet irony, but also a little monotonous in its archaic amplitude and ceremony. But there is every reason to call prose his relaxation: no maker of verse still young in years has so frequently attained a perfect form or kept before him so resolutely an intimate ideal of verbal limpidity and imaginative splendour. Herein he differs from other Symbolists; yet his adherence to that school is not (like that of Jean Moréas) provisional; for its original tendency to use the world of sense as the surest reflexion of individual souls, is nowhere more impressively illustrated than in his works from *Tel qu'en Songe* to *La Cité des Eaux*. But his vision is lucid; his luxurious temperament, afflicted with the *lacrimae rerum*, loves most to evoke the external objects

with which it finds durable and immediate associations: naiads and fauns, swift horses, marble busts, laurels and moss-grown fountains, with gates of brass and golden sunsets, are emblems of regret and glory and ancient peace which time has appropriated and approved.

His imagery is rich, not recondite; his vocabulary personal without strangeness. M. de Régnier loves the magnificence of words which remember their ancestors, and all the pomp of syntax; and also he possesses, alone perhaps among the innovators, a strong traditional sense of rhythmical structure. His polymorphous odes may be read almost without a hesitation of the ear, the line being a rhythmical and logical (not only an arbitrary, typographical) unit within the strophe. After some youthful experiments with an optional mute syllable his most constant practice has been to retain that unique source of French verse, the feminine *e*. He breaks his lines without prejudice, but also without mechanical irregularity, and admits the clash of vowels, avoiding harshness always. He rimes for the ear, and nearly always abundantly; but substitutes a deceitful assonance with extreme discretion here and there. In a word, M. de Régnier (whose writing has all the spell of conquering youth, but also the ineffable distinction of an art which is not improvised) is a French poet intensely national in tone, who has given something more than promises already to the formal 'reformation from within.'

All the poetry of Henri de Régnier is published by the Société du *Mercure de France.*

Premiers Poèmes (*Lendemains*, 1885; *Apaisement*, 1886; *Sites*, 1887; *Épisodes*, 1888—Paris: Vanier), republished in 1899. *Poèmes* 1887-1892(*Poèmes Anciens et Romanesques; Tel qu'en Songe*), collected in 1896; *Les Jeux Rustiques et Divins*, 1897; *Les Médailles d'Argile*, 1900; *La Cité des Eaux*, 1903; *La Sandale ailée*, 1907.

CXV

APPARITION

Le galop de la houle écume à l'horizon.
Regarde. La voici qui vient. Les vagues sont
Farouches et le vent dur qui les fouette rue
Leur troupe furieuse et leur foule bourrue.

Regarde. Celle-ci s'abat et vois cette autre
Derrière elle qui, fourbe et hargneuse et plus haute,
Lui passe sur la croupe et la franchit d'un bond
Et se brise à son tour tandis qu'un éperon,
Invisible aux deux flancs de celle qui la suit,
La dresse hennissante et l'effondre en un bruit
De vent qui s'époumonne et d'eau qui bave et fume.
O poitrails de tempête et crinières d'écume!
J'ai regardé longtemps debout au vent amer
Cette course sans fin des chevaux de la mer
Et j'attends que l'un d'eux hors de l'onde mouvante
Sorte et, soudain ouvrant ses ailes ruisselantes,
M'offre, pour que du poing je le saisisse aux crins,
L'écumeux cabrement du Pégase marin.

[*Les Médailles d'Argile.*

CXVI

ODELETTE

J'aurais pu dire mon Amour
Tout haut
Dans le grand jour
Ardent et chaud
Du bel été d'or roux qui l'exalte et l'enivre
Et le dresse debout avec un rire
A tout écho!

J'aurais pu dire:
Mon Amour est heureux, voyez
Son manteau de pourpre qui traîne
Jusqu'à ses pieds!
Ses mains sont pleines
De roses qu'il effeuille et qui parfument l'air;
Le ciel est clair
Sur sa maison de marbre tiède
Et blanc et veiné comme une chair
Douce aux lèvres . . .

Mais non,
Je l'ai vêtu de bure et de laine ;
Son manteau traîne
Sur ses talons ;
Il passe en souriant à peine
Et quand il chante, c'est si bas
Que l'on ne se retourne pas
Pour cueillir sa chanson éclose
Dans le soir qu'elle a parfumé ;
Il n'a ni jardin, ni maison,
Et il fait semblant d'être pauvre
Pour mieux cacher qu'il est aimé.

[*A travers l'An.*

CXVII

La Colline

Cette colline est belle, inclinée et pensive ;
Sa ligne sur le ciel est pure à l'horizon.
Elle est un de ces lieux où la vie indécise
Voudrait planter sa vigne et bâtir sa maison.

Nul pourtant n'a choisi sa pente solitaire
Pour y vivre ses jours, un à un, au penchant
De ce souple coteau doucement tutélaire
Vers qui monte la plaine et se hausse le champ.

Aucun toit n'y fait luire, au soleil qui l'irise
Ou l'empourpre, dans l'air du soir ou du matin,
Sa tuile rougeoyante ou son ardoise grise . . .
Et personne jamais n'y fixa son destin

De tous ceux qui, passant, un jour, devant la grâce
De ce site charmant et qu'ils auraient aimé,
En ont senti renaître en leur mémoire lasse
La forme pacifique et le songe embaumé.

C'est ainsi que chacun rapporte du voyage
Au fond de son cœur triste et de ses yeux en pleurs
Quelque vaine, éternelle et fugitive image
De silence, de paix, de rêve et de bonheur.

Mais, sur la pente verte et lentement déclive,
Qui donc plante sa vigne et bâtit sa maison ?
Hélas ! et la colline inclinée et pensive
Avec le souvenir demeure à l'horizon !

[*La Cité des Eaux : Ode et poésies.*

CXVIII

La Menace

Vous aimerez un jour peut-être ce visage
Qui vous plaît aujourd'hui
Par le trouble, le mal, l'angoisse et le ravage
Que vous faites en lui.

Car vous aurez alors, pour l'œuvre de vos charmes,
Un douloureux regret,
Et ce temps vous verra maudire avec des larmes
Ce que vous aurez fait.

A ces yeux détournés, à cette bouche lasse
Vous chercherez en vain
Que l'amer souvenir disparaisse et s'efface
De votre long dédain,

A moins que, par orgueil, luttant contre vous-même,
Vous vous disiez tout bas :
Que m'importe qu'il souffre et qu'il pleure et qu'il m'aime,
Puisque je n'aime pas ?

Et pour, de cette image importune et morose,
Éloigner votre esprit,
Vous cueillerez l'odeur de la plus rouge rose,
Que juin gonfle et mûrit ;

Vous penserez à vous et à votre jeunesse
Et à votre beauté,
A la langueur, à la couleur, à la tendresse
De ce beau ciel d'été,

A des pays lointains, à des villes lointaines,
Au delà de la mer,
A des palais, à des jardins, à des fontaines
Qui s'élèvent dans l'air.

Vous fermerez en vain sur ces beaux paysages
Vos yeux, et, malgré vous,
Vos yeux se rouvriront pour revoir ce visage
Qui vous sera plus doux,

Plus doux que le printemps et plus doux que l'automne,
Que la terre et le ciel,
Plus doux que cette lune ardente, courbe et jaune,
Couleur d'ambre et de miel.

[*La Sandale ailée.*

FRANCIS VIELÉ-GRIFFIN

1864

An American by birth, of Welsh and Dutch descent, M. Vielé-Griffin is one of the three or four foreigners who use the French language in verse with real distinction. He was born at Norfolk, in Virginia, but came to France very young, and has lived alternately in Paris and in Touraine, for which smiling and aristocratic province his best poetry has expressed a special sympathy. His first verses appeared in a little periodical now defunct; Vanier, the publisher of *les jeunes*, brought out his earlier volumes. The accent was personal from the first, but the form in *Cueille d'Avril* (1886) and *Les Cygnes* (1887) was mainly traditional. *La Chevauchée d'Yeldis*, followed shortly by *Joics* (1889), defined his spiritual bias and the originality of his formal ambition; and with successive productions M. Vielé-Griffin's reputation grew steadily among a public consisting chiefly of comrades and rivals, until two collective volumes, *Poèmes et Poésies* (1895) and *Clarté de Vie* (1898), which included some legends in dramatic form —notably *Swanhilde*—forced the critics who have access to a wider circle of readers to take his work very seriously. The poet is himself a thoughtful and fastidious critic; he writes in English as well as in French; and in 1895 he had published a remarkable translation of Mr. Swinburne's *Laus Veneris*. His principal additions since 1898 to the poetry contained in the books named are *La Légende ailée de Wieland le Forgeron* (1900), and *L'Amour sacré*—meditations and dialogues in honour of holy women published in 1903 by *L'Occident* and since reprinted (1906) along with other lyrics in a volume called *Au Loin* (Société du *Mercure de France*).

Both in the form and the spirit of his poetry M. Vielé-Griffin has remained unrepentingly attached to the standard raised more than twenty years since; he may indeed be called the leader at this day of a school which is no longer aggressive nor intact. An instinctive nobility of thought, verbal invention, a genuine gift of harmony, with something almost virginal in the suavity of his accents, distinguish this poet, whose writing is all marked with the purpose of giving a sense to life and preoccupied with mystical affinities between material change and human destiny, and betrays a temperament

which is rich in the faculty of wonder. He has put a new soul into old legends and imagined new ones, and almost alone in his generation he has shown himself capable of large poetical conceptions. It may be admitted that some of his work is diffuse and tenuous, and that the suggestive reticence of his symbolism now and again gives way to the eloquent mediocrity of allegorical abstractions.

M. Vielé-Griffin has a real power of structure and his metrical intentions (the key and the rhythm once set) are generally clear. In a system of versification which manifestly depends rather upon the number of stresses—and therefore upon the device of equivalent—than upon syllabic enumeration, it is difficult not to discern the influence of English verse. Probably on the strength of his origin he has been called a pupil of Walt Whitman; but the technical prestige of Mr. Swinburne seems to have affected him more, if one may judge by his fondness for alliteration and the characteristic falling rhythm of three syllables, sometimes called 'anapaestic.' His rimes are occasionally imperfect and always independent of spelling.

CXIX

Ronde Finale

La bise tourne et la brise
Chante clair dans les branches noires;
La porte s'ouvre en surprise
Et rejette au mur le heurtoir;
Elles vont vers le printemps en fête
Radieuses de jeune espoir,
Car le vieux soleil scintille
Et voici le silex qui brille
Sur la route sèche et nette . . .
La vie est faite et défaite
Comme un bouquet aux mains d'une fille.

Avec des fleurs qui causent,
Qu'on effeuille sans se le dire:
Et la chanson fraîche éclose;
Des bruits de querelles et des bruits de rires;
La dernière violette et la première rose;
Avec tout l'avenir
Dans les yeux, sur la bouche qui s'ose

Jusqu'au baiser bénin où les lèvres se closent
En un petit frisson et un grand soupir;
Au long du parterre qu'elles pillent
Elles vont vers l'été, blondes têtes! . . .
La vie est faite et défaite
Comme un bouquet aux mains d'une fille.

Dans les foins ou les fleurs qui meurent
Sont douces comme un vain regret;
Sous les saules qui pleurent et effleurent
L'eau qui dort comme une morte à leurs pieds;
Elles vont vers l'automne et babillent
Avec des mots de poète:
La vie est faite et défaite
Comme un bouquet aux mains d'une fille.

La chanson sonne autour du pressoir
Au pas lourd des vignerons;
L'ombre, plus hâtive à chaque soir,
Disperse les rondes qu'elle rompt
Comme des guirlandes fanées;
Les plaines sont moissonnées,
Les treilles découronnées;
Rieuses, mais étonnées,
Sous l'effeuillaison des charmilles
Elles vont vers l'hiver qui les guette:
Car la vie est faite et défaite
Comme un bouquet aux mains d'une fille.

La Clarté de Vie: Chansons à L'Ombre.

CXX

On se prouve que tout est bien;
Qu'il est sage de changer de rêve;
Que tout sera mieux, demain;
Que le passé s'y achève;
Qu'il est bon de rompre un lien;
De fouler les feuilles mortes;
Qu'hier est déjà trop ancien
Pour qu'on en cause encor de la sorte;

Que la vie est toujours nouvelle;
Que demain est le jour des forts . . .
Je me souviens d'heures plus belles
Que demain—et demain, c'est la mort.

Demain, est aux vingt ans fiers;
Leurs rires passent, et l'on reste accoudé;
On a honte, un peu, de ses joyeux hiers,
Comme d'un habit démodé.

Demain, c'est l'automne qui parle
De plus près à l'oreille qui l'écoute.
Je suis sans regret, mais j'ai mal;
Je suis sans effroi, mais je doute;

Non certes, de ma journée:
J'ai vécu, au mieux, le poème;
Mais l'âme reste étonnée
De n'être plus elle-même.

J'emporte comme un fardeau léger,
Comme une gerbe de fleurs et de feuilles,
Toute l'ombre de ton verger,
Toute la lumière de ton seuil;

Le poids est si doux qu'il m'enivre
D'un baiser de lys sur la bouche;
Fait-il donc tout ceci pour, enfin, que tu livres
L'aveu de ton âme farouche?

Il est bon de partir quand on aime,
Il est doux de se quitter ainsi:
Puisqu'on ne le sait qu'à ce prix
Et qu'on se découvre soi-même.

[*La Partenza*, xiii-xv.

GUSTAVE KAHN

1859

M. Kahn was born at Metz of Jewish parentage, and finished his education at the School of Oriental Languages in Paris. After some journalistic experience he spent four years in North Africa and, on returning to Paris, founded *La Vogue* (1886) and produced in that strenuous little review most of the pieces which are to be found in his first volume of poetry. He took an active part in the management of another militant periodical, *Le Symboliste*, and in this and other organs—French and Belgian—of the new poetical movement he did notable work for some years as a critic and especially as a theorist on prosody. *Les Nomades*, published in 1887, was among the first-fruits of Symbolism; and M. Kahn speedily won and maintained by successive publications a very eminent place among French poets of the day. The best part of his output in verse—relatively small in quantity—is collected in two volumes: *Premiers Poèmes* and *Le Livre d'Images* (Paris, 1897: Société du *Mercure de France*). In prose he has written some novels, an anti-catholic pamphlet, and *L'Esthétique de la Rue* (1901).

Among the writers of this generation who have enriched or at least variegated the garden of French poetry with exotics, M. Kahn has cultivated some rare plants of Eastern origin. The Orient which his cunning and often delicious music evokes most often is rather that Orient whose charm filtered into the French poetry of the Middle Ages than that with which the Romantics glutted their wild and uninstructed fancy: but it is above all the Orient for which a poet of Eastern race, a nomad exiled in the settled order of the West, yearns inconsolably. He evokes it by the opulent embroidery of his dreams and by the languorous tenderness of his subtle incantations. M. Kahn is an arabesque illuminator who decorates the short essential themes of many ballads and many tales with designs at once hieratic and elusive in their variety. He is often (and especially in his earlier work) obscure; and he has been reproached quite justly with a licentious syntax and a vocabulary in which words that are too old and words that are too young jostle each other disconcertingly. But no one denies his great verbal charm.

He was probably the first French poet who broke altogether with the ancient forms of French verse, and attempted not a renovation but something entirely new. The system he devised (of which the preface to *Premiers poèmes* gives the theory) is complicated and indeed unique. It is enough to say that neither rime nor the enumeration of syllables is essential to it, and that the principle of recurrence is transferred to the rhythmical elements into which a model or thematic line may be resolved and to the feelings or ideas which it expresses. Internal assonance, and also parallelism (which is the assonance of meaning) play a paramount part in the construction of M. Kahn's curious and—given the conditions—accomplished verse. It is to be regretted that he has in recent years produced so little of it.

CXXI

Quand le roi vint à sa tour
la belle vint lui dire—Ah, Roi

Ni les épouses de tes vizirs qui s'entr'ouvrent sous tes regards
ni les lointaines exilées qui pleurent les fôrets barbares
ne décèlent les inconnus que dénouent mes bras tour à tour.

Loin de toi souffrir est dur aux fleurs de l'âme,
l'âme pâtit d'appels inutiles et languit:
ce coffret de saveurs à toi, mon corps, prends-le pour toi;
que tes mains bénissent mon front incliné.

De la tour le roi répondit:

Ce rêve que tu vins tendre tes lèvres courtes
toutes les âmes de mon être l'attendaient en habits de fête;
pour tes lèvres et l'escorte de décors de ton rêve
les tapis sont prêts et les lampes veillent et les vœux attendent.
que tardais-tu, en rires perdus, où dormais-tu?

Quand le roi dormit sur la tour, la belle triste frissonna

Si tu ne savais pas que c'est errance et trêve
le pauvre instant d'amour endormeur du remords
je sais qu'il lui faut être unique et comme en rêve
et je vais vers les ombres apâlies de la mort.

[*Chansons d'amant:* Éventails.

CXXII

Image

Le cabaret est plein de panses
dévotes devant autant de brocs,
et c'est fumée dense.
Le compagnon du tour de France
y vient frapper ; c'est son repos.

Femme, donnez-moi le gîte
et me versez du vin sans eau.—
Es-tu charpentier, es-tu matelot,
es-tu calfat ?
Nous avons ici besoin de ces gens-là.

Femme, verse-moi plein mon broc.
Voici l'ami compas et la fidèle équerre ;
je sais tailler des bibelots
dans le bois de chêne, avec mon ciseau
et sertir des saints pour la proue des vaisseaux.—
Il n'est ici nul vaisseau
que des barques grêles et puis des radeaux,
les uns pour la mer, d'autres pour les canaux ;
on taillait des saints au temps des prières,
l'église maintenant a une porte en fer
et les ex-votos sont en carton-pierre.

Alors les temps sont durs ?—
oui, on mange les os
et l'on gratte la huche et l'on boit le vin sur.
Alors, commère, le gîte et un broc,
un peu de fromage et puis un chanteau.
Je partirai demain plus loin de la mer.

[*Le Livre d'Images*: Par la Lande et la Mer grise.

ALBERT SAMAIN

1858-1900

THE parents of Albert Samain were tradespeople at Lille. He was a schoolboy when his father died; and to help to support his mother and a younger sister and brother he was obliged to take a place in a bank, and a little later became cashier to a firm of sugar brokers. His early life was dull, friendless and laborious, but he snatched what time he could for reading, taught himself Greek and English, and had begun to write verses when, in 1880, an extension of the business brought him to Paris. Here he was persuaded to try his luck in journalism, but without influence he could not get his work accepted: only a Lille review gave shelter to some middling prose of his about this time. His mother and brother joined him in Paris and his commercial prospects grew brighter: but he preferred to get smaller pay and more leisure as a clerk in the civil service, and from 1883 until his last illness he was employed at the Préfecture de la Seine. Acting on the advice of M. Richepin, with whom he had a slight acquaintance, Samain now attempted to escape from intellectual insulation by joining a group of young literary vagabonds who called themselves 'Nous Autres'; and when Salis started his 'Chat Noir,' began to spout verses at that famous night-house. The name was also given to a paper, and there some few of his early poems appeared and were appreciated by the more intelligent members of the fraternity, though Samain was far from sharing the revolutionary aspirations just beginning to be formulated, and was in fact content as yet to echo the distinctive notes of Parnassus with a scholarly perfection. Out of these first literary associations two or three solid friendships developed. But his life was still very lonely, for he was poor and very shy; and for several years, while, for his mother's sake, with a filial piety rare even in France, he still devoted most of his time to an uncongenial livelihood, he continued silently groping and finding his way in the tangle of opposing formulas into which he had wandered without the ordinary initiation of the schools, and wisely refused to interrupt by premature publication a long struggle to attain complete sincerity with the knowledge of his real bent. Holidays, at long intervals, on the Rhine, in Savoy, in London,

were his only distraction, and the only events in his monotonous existence.

At last, in 1893, *Au Jardin de l'Infante* was published. The critics almost unanimously saluted a new poet, a great poet. The scruples of an excessive modesty, and some constitutional inertia, prevented Samain from following up this legitimate success at once; —and when *Aux Flancs du Vase* appeared in 1898 it was almost overlooked. Meanwhile he had caught glimpses of the Low Countries, the Pyrenees and Italy, and these travels as well as his continual exploration of the beauties of Paris and a wide range of reading (which included metaphysics) had furnished his imagination and ballasted his mind. He had taken a conspicuous part, too, in founding a literary organ destined to a brilliant career, *Le Mercure de France*, and contributed both poetry and short stories to its pages.

After the appearance of his second volume, Samain set to work at once on a dramatic poem, *Polyphème*. But his health, which had always been delicate, and had suffered much from constant overwork and disappointments, now became precarious. His mother's death at the end of 1898 was a blow from which he did not recover; and a winter in the South only retarded for a few months the progress of a consumption which soon showed itself. A year later, having broken down entirely, he was taken to Lille, his birthplace, to be nursed by his sister, and from Lille to the country house of a friend in the valley of Chevreuse, near Versailles. It was there that he quietly expired in the summer of 1900. A third volume of poetry, *Le Chariot d'Or*, was published posthumously, and also some stories in prose. *Polyphème*, his exquisitely pathetic sylvan tragedy, was produced at a Paris theatre, with great success, so lately as the summer of 1908.

The entirely personal talent of Albert Samain developed slowly and almost in solitude, and is the more sincere. Temperament in him was stronger than literary admirations which, perhaps, leaned to a poetry more stately, more objective and of harder outlines than his own. He is the most spontaneous of Symbolists, for his soul is in his dreams and with the roses and statues of his enchanted garden he expressed himself. 'Un paysage est un état d'âme.' The yearning for far-off imagined lands is the supreme emotion of his poetry, and regretful as a memory of lost delight and faded glory. No French poet is more sensitive to the nervous spell of hours and seasons: in

none of our time is a more poignant tenderness ennobled by a finer discretion. He was rich in pity and in fortitude. Something of Vigny's reserved and lucid melancholy, of the languor and the secret bitterness that are in Léon Dierx, belongs to Samain; and by a certain simplicity and his melodious perfection he continues Verlaine. His form, unfettered by mere prosodical superstitions, cleaves to the sane tradition of French verse: it is absolutely accomplished; for Samain's grace, limpidity, delicate sense of colour and intensity of accent are unfailing, whether they are used to suggest the anxious premonitions of silence or the restlessness that twilight brings, or to evoke Parisian sunsets, autumnal forests or the lights of English harbours, or to resuscitate the golden frailty of the passengers for Cythera, or raise before us the heroic or voluptuous ghosts of ancient fame.

Au Jardin de l'Infante, *Le Chariot d'Or* and *Aux Flancs du Vase* (with *Polyphème*), as well as a volume of *Contes* are all published by the Société du *Mercure de France*. M. Léon Bocquet's remarkable study of the poet's life and work is published by the same Society (1904).

CXXIII

MUSIQUE SUR L'EAU

Oh! Écoute la symphonie;
Rien n'est doux comme une agonie
Dans la musique indéfinie
Qu'exhale un lointain vaporeux;

D'une langueur la nuit s'enivre,
Et notre cœur qu'elle délivre
Du monotone effort de vivre
Se meurt d'un trépas langoureux.

Glissons entre le ciel et l'onde,
Glissons sous la lune profonde;
Toute mon âme, loin du monde,
S'est réfugiée en tes yeux,

Et je regarde tes prunelles
Se pâmer sous les chanterelles,
Comme deux fleurs surnaturelles
Sous un rayon mélodieux.

Oh! écoute la symphonie;
Rien n'est doux comme l'agonie
De la lèvre à la lèvre unie
Dans la musique indéfinie . . .

[*Au Jardin de l'Infante.*

CXXIV

AUTOMNE

A pas lents et suivis du chien de la maison,
Nous refaisons la route à présent trop connue.
Un pâle automne saigne au fond de l'avenue,
Et des femmes en deuil passent à l'horizon.

Comme dans un préau d'hospice ou de prison,
L'air est calme et d'une tristesse contenue;
Et chaque feuille d'or tombe, l'heure venue,
Ainsi qu'un souvenir, lente, sur le gazon.

Le Silence entre nous marche . . . Cœurs de mensonges,
Chacun, las du voyage, et mûr pour d'autres songes,
Rêve égoïstement de retourner au port.

Mais les bois ont, ce soir, tant de mélancolie
Que notre cœur s'émeut à son tour et s'oublie
A parler du passé, sous le ciel qui s'endort,

Doucement, à mi-voix, comme d'un enfant mort . . .

[*Au Jardin de l'Infante.*

CXXV

VEILLÉE

Penser. Seul dans la nuit sibylline frémir! . . .
Être pareil au feu, pur, subtil et vivace;
Et, respirant l'Idée errante dans l'espace,
Sentir, ainsi qu'un dieu, son front mortel grandir.

Ordonner à son sang héroïque d'agir;
Quitter ses vanités pauvres, clinquant et crasse;
Et revêtant l'orgueil, claire et bonne cuirasse,
D'un élan ivre au seuil de l'infini surgir!

Sentir passer en soi, comme une onde ruisselle,
Le flot mélodieux de l'âme universelle,
Entendre dans son cœur le ciel même qui bat :

Et comme un Salomon, lourd de magnificence,
Voir dans un faste d'or, de pierres et d'essences,
Venir à soi son œuvre en reine de Saba.

[*Au Jardin de l'Infante.*

CXXVI

Soir de Printemps

Premiers soirs de printemps : tendresse inavouée . . .
Aux tiédeurs de la brise écharpe dénouée . . .
Caresse aérienne . . . Encens mystérieux . . .
Urne qu'une main d'ange incline au bord des cieux . . .
Oh ! quel désir ainsi, troublant le fond des âmes,
Met ce pli de langueur à la hanche des femmes ?
Le couchant est d'or rose et la joie emplit l'air,
Et la ville, ce soir, chante comme la mer.
Du clair jardin d'avril la porte est entr'ouverte,
Aux arbres légers tremble une poussière verte.
Un peuple d'artisans descend des ateliers ;
Et, dans l'ombre où sans fin sonnent les lourds souliers,
On dirait qu'une main de Véronique essuie
Les fronts rudes tachés de sueur et de suie.
La semaine s'achève, et voici que soudain,
Joyeuses d'annoncer la Pâques de demain,
Les cloches, s'ébranlant aux vieilles tours gothiques,
Et revenant du fond des siècles catholiques,
Font tressaillir quand même aux frissons anciens
Ce qui reste de foi dans nos vieux os chrétiens !
Mais déjà, souriant sous ses voiles sévères,
La nuit, la nuit païenne apprête ses mystères :
Et le croissant d'or fin, qui monte dans l'azur,
Rayonne, par degrés plus limpide et plus pur.
Sur la ville brûlante, un instant apaisée,
On dirait qu'une main de femme s'est posée ;
Les couleurs, les rumeurs s'éteignent peu à peu ;
L'enchantement du soir s'achève . . . et tout est bleu !

Ineffable minute où l'âme de la foule
Se sent mourir un peu dans le jour qui s'écoule . . .
Et le cœur va flottant vers de tendres hasards
Dans l'ombre qui s'étoile aux lanternes des chars.
Premiers soirs de printemps : brises, légères fièvres !
Douceur des yeux ! . . . Tiédeur des mains ! . . . Langueur des lèvres !
Et l'Amour, une rose à la bouche, laissant
Traîner à terre un peu de son manteau glissant,
Nonchalamment s'accoude au parapet du fleuve,
Et puisant au carquois d'or une flèche neuve,
De ses beaux yeux voilés, cruel adolescent,
Sourit, silencieux, à la Nuit qui consent.

[*Le Chariot d'Or.*

CXXVII

Mon enfance captive a vécu dans des pierres,
Dans la ville où sans fin, vomissant le charbon,
L'usine en feu dévore un peuple moribond.
Et pour voir des jardins je fermais les paupières . . .

J'ai grandi ; j'ai rêvé d'orient, de lumières,
De rivages de fleurs où l'air tiède sent bon,
De cités aux noms d'or, et, seigneur vagabond,
De pavés florentins où traîner des rapières.

Puis je pris en dégoût le carton du décor
Et maintenant j'entends en moi l'âme du Nord
Qui chante, et chaque jour j'aime d'un cœur plus fort

Ton air de sainte femme, ô ma terre de Flandre,
Ton peuple grave et droit, ennemi de l'esclandre,
Ta douceur de misère où le cœur se sent prendre,

Tes marais, tes prés verts où rouissent les lins,
Tes bateaux, ton ciel gris où tournent les moulins,
Et cette veuve en noir avec ses orphelins . . .

[*Le Chariot d'Or.*

PAUL FORT

1872

M. Paul Fort, who was born at Reims, began to be heard of before he was twenty, as the founder of a little theatre which succeeded in introducing *The Cenci* of Shelley and Marlowe's *Faustus* to a few Parisians, besides some plays of M. Maeterlinck's which are now famous. Since his first book appeared in 1894, he has written and published a considerable quantity of poetry under the general title of *Ballades françaises.*

It would seem that he adopted the system of printing verse to look like prose not so much as a test of its genuine quality, as under an illusion that he writes something between the two. There is nothing between verse and prose (except bad prose and execrable verse); and the *Ballades* of M. Fort, since they conform to an external rhythm quite independent of typography, are indubitably verse, and verse of remarkable merit. Indeed, in nearly every case, the measure they suggest immediately to the reader's ear, being an old traditional measure, imposes itself in spite of the syllabic variations the poet affects, sometimes counting the mutes and sometimes neglecting them, and occasionally docking a hemistich of a syllable: it is seldom that one is left in any doubt how to read his lines, because they are ancestral, and because he has tact; the norm being quite certain, the ear invents a system of equivalents easily. Let it be added that M. Fort, when he uses the Alexandrine, as he does chiefly, respects the 'median *caesura*' far more consistently than many of his contemporaries or immediate predecessors. He often rimes richly, often substitutes assonance, sometimes uses alliteration —here and there blank verse. In a word it is the verse of a scholar cunning enough to reproduce the very irregularities of that popular poetry in which the French provinces are so rich—but without losing his own real spontaneity.

The title of his poetry (of course he uses the word *ballade* in the Romantic, which is the English sense, not the formal one) is applicable especially to his first series—songs of the French countrysides, familiar and intense, picturesque and evocative, in which the readers of Mr. A. E. Housman may catch here and there a fugitive affinity

with the *Shropshire Lad.* M. Fort is at his best perhaps when he is most homely; but he is often admirable, too, when he leaves the village behind him and the ringing steeples and the husbandmen and the cheerful highways, and at a higher pitch of aesthetical emotion, but with equal limpidity and the same independence of studious prosodies, harmonises his being with some single aspect of the beautiful world, bathes in sunlight, drinks in the breeze and tells how happy he is to be alive. He has seen hills and ocean, storm and twilight with his own eyes and sung them with radiant sincerity. Also, he has peopled the woodlands with Silenus' crew; has made himself a medieval chronicler, a Monstrelet or a Juvénal des Ursins in verse, to tell the life and legend of *Louis Onze*; he has even composed a little love story, *Lucienne*, which is almost a very modern novel. So various are these *Ballades.* Possibly he does not know how much more he is a renewer than an innovator; at any rate he has forged himself an instrument infinitely supple, of infinite promise in the hands of an artist singularly curious and receptive, but unmistakably and sanely national. If the audacious impressionism of Laforgue and the confidential lispings of Verlaine have borne a part in his development, the spiritual identity of M. Paul Fort persists in a particular intonation, fresh as the sea-spray and as tender as young grass.

Les Ballades françaises are published by the Société du *Mercure de France.*

CXXVIII

BALLADES

Ah! que de joie, la flûte et la musette troublent nos cœurs de leurs accords charmants, voici venir les gars et les fillettes, et tous les vieux au son des instruments.

Gai, gai, marions-nous, les rubans et les cornettes, gai, gai, marions-nous, et ce joli couple, itou!

Que de plaisirs quand dans l'église en fête cloche et clochettes les appelle tertous,—trois cents clochettes pour les yeux de la belle, un gros bourdon pour le cœur de l'époux.

Gai, gai, marions-nous, les rubans et les cornettes, gai, gai, marions-nous, et ce joli couple, itou!

La cloche enfin tient nos langues muettes. Ah ! que de peine quand ce n'est plus pour nous. . . . Pleurez, les vieux, sur vos livres de messe. Qui sait ? bientôt la cloche sera pour vous.

Gai, gai, marions-nous, les rubans et les cornettes, gai, gai, marions-nous, et ce joli couple, itou !

Enfin c'est tout, et la cloche est muette. Allons danser au bonheur des époux. Vive le gars et la fille et la fête ! Ah ! que de joie quand ce n'est pas pour nous.

Gai, gai, marions-nous, les rubans et les cornettes, gai, gai, marions-nous, et ce joli couple, itou !

Que de plaisir, la flûte et la musette vont rajeunir les vieux pour un moment. Voici danser les gars et les fillettes. Ah ! que de joie au son des instruments !

[*Ballades françaises :* Les Cloches.

CXXIX

Vision du Crépuscule

Plus limpide à mourir qu'il ne le fut à naître, et couleur des étoiles avant de disparaître, le jour promène au loin sa lumière de songe. Derrière la colline où s'espacent les hêtres, il argente le ciel, mélodieux sous les branches : et tous les troncs alignent leur ombre qui s'allonge.

Je laisse aller ma vie au gré du jour mourant. Je sens comme un bien-être et comme une sagesse pénétrer en mon âme. Et l'extase me prend à la fraîche lumière blanchissant l'azur calme, à ces hêtres voilés de soir, à leur tristesse, à l'inclinaison triste et grave de leurs palmes.

Une clarté sereine, une blancheur céleste, que doucement dégradent les nuances de l'azur, un blanc foyer de lueurs, immense et couvrant l'Ouest, comme un grand lys glacial balancé dans l'air pur, accuse la colline et la met en relief. . . . Je laisse errer ma vie au gré du jour mourant. Je gravis la colline et je marche en rêvant.

Or je traîne mon ombre, ainsi, baissant la tête. Une lueur de jour est sur le gazon ras, et les hêtres allongent leur

ombre vers mes pas. Est-ce l'aube naissante? ou le jour qui s'épanche? . . . Je lève les deux mains, et leurs paumes sont blanches. Derrière la colline où s'espacent les hêtres, le soir berce un grand lys lumineux sous les branches.

Cependant les étoiles, au-dessus de ma tête, scintillent. Le zénith a son azur profond. Bientôt le Chariot d'or y posera son timon. Là-bas, nageant dans l'ombre, est-ce un vaisseau de nacre, ce nuage pommelé où brûle Aldébaran? Le ciel oriental a revêtu ses astres; je les revois mirés dans un fleuve aux eaux lentes—puis, tournée vers le jour, ma prunelle s'argente.

Cette clarté subite, oubliée, me surprend, plus glacée qu'un miroir. Quel éblouissement de prisme tournoyant vient envahir mon être? . . . Mes paupières se closent dans le ravissement. Je vois en moi le Jour et ses heures de fête! Éblouissez mon âme, belles heures mêlées! Tantôt c'est une aurore en feu qui me pénètre, un midi d'or traînant les violettes du couchant, et tantôt c'est l'azur d'une aube dévoilée, où la terre paraît, couronnée de verdure.

Je bute dans les herbes, mes yeux s'ouvrent au monde. Je regarde les hêtres et je les sens pleins d'ombre. O ce jour sous les arbres où se plaint le zéphyr, pourquoi si froidement me vient-il éclairer? . . . Je m'approche des hêtres: je les ai vus frémir. Et voici qu'une feuille se découpe tremblante sur le ciel argenté, que des milliers de feuilles se détachent du soir, que des millions de feuilles se découpent en noir, par la brise agiteés! Je les vois, une à une, et par branche, éclater noires au ciel limpide, et je vois l'ombre prendre, comme un feu dévorant, sur leur foule parlante.

D'un seul effort j'atteins le haut de la colline. Mes yeux fouillent l'espace de ce côté qui luit. Et devant moi, partout, dans l'ombre où le jour fuit, et jusqu'aux horizons faisant mouvoir leurs lignes, je vois des arbres noirs s'écheveler vers lui. J'écoute; j'entends les feuilles mollement crépiter, les arbres s'agiter, tordre des flammes sombres, déchirées en flammèches sous des vents argentés. C'est l'incendie de l'ombre au fond d'un soir d'été! . . . Brusquement, le ciel

même est envahi par l'ombre. . . . Trois fois un jet d'argent sort comme une touffeur d'orage, de plus lointain des collines boisées. Mais ce n'est pas la foudre, ce ne sont pas ses lueurs, je n'entends pas rouler le tonnerre—et j'ai peur ! Et je me sens mourir et mon cœur s'est glacé, à cet appel mystique du soleil effacé.

[*Les Hymnes du Feu*, vii.
(*Ballades françaises*, vii^e *Série*).

CHARLES GUÉRIN

1873

M. Charles Guérin is a Lorrain from Lunéville, who seldom leaves his native province. He once edited and indeed composed a poetical magazine called *Le Sonnet* at Nancy, and has contributed to a good many young periodicals: but he has kept aloof from the 'schools' and from the literary quarrels of his time. His first poems were hardly noticed, but with *Le Cœur Solitaire* he became almost famous, and he is one of the younger poets of whom something great may be expected with confidence. A subtle and mature technique in his case has discovered new secrets of expression and used them without eccentricity. His personal, sensitive and limpid talent recalls Albert Samain, but if he has not all the intensity as yet of the author of *Polyphème*, he is also healthier. He is in all senses an idealist, and like his countryman, M. Maurice Barrès, he may be said to represent a sort of national reaction in art which is almost inseparable from a sympathy (if no more) with all the French traditions, and especially the Christian tradition. For the rest he does not force the emotional note, he thinks and awakens thought, he attains the just epithet without apparent effort, and he uses the strict syllabic verse —riming however exclusively for the ear and very often varying rime with pure assonance. He inclines to a certain diffuseness. M. Guérin has expressed a fraternal admiration for another living poet, M. Francis Jammes, who, from the solitude of his home at the foot of the Pyrenees, has launched more than one volume of poetical merchandise in which the mixture of good and bad is almost inextricable. M. Jammes is indeed (what is rare in French literature) a true bucolic poet, but his form exceeds too often the singular disdain of poetical ritual reached by Jules Laforgue, whose influence is very apparent upon his earlier work (*De l'Angelus de l'aube à l'Angelus du soir*), full as it is of experiments in deliberate triviality and in deliberate prosaism. It would be unpardonable not to mention his name in speaking of M. Guérin; but it is not possible to give a just notion of his originality within limits which neither his intrinsic merit nor his authority would justify us in exceeding.

Joies Grises, 1894 ; *Le Sang des Crépuscules*, 1895 ; *Sonnets et un Poème*, 1897 ; *Le Semeur de Cendres*, 1901 ; *Le Cœur Solitaire*, 1898 ; *L'Éros funèbre*, 1900.

CXXX

Le sombre ciel lacté se voûte en forme d'arche.
Un grand silence ému berce les choses ; l'arbre
Palpite au vent léger qui passe, et dans l'étable
On entend remuer les bêtes dans la paille.
La confuse rumeur des sèves qui travaillent
Traverse le sommeil de l'homme après la tâche.
Comme un laboureur las qui s'arrache à la glèbe,
L'humble poète alors sort de la chair et lève
Vers la vivante nuit, radieuse et profonde,
Un front qui porte aussi sa lumière et ses mondes.
Hélas ! interroger ce qui ne peut répondre,
Dit-il ! ah ! tout mon cœur débile et sa misère !
J'ai laissé sous mon toit s'endormir mon aïeule,
Et me voici, devant le songe de la terre,
Frissonnant comme un brin de foin sec sur la meule.
Le rhythme intérieur qui régit la matière
Comme l'illustre lyre antique émeut les pierres,
Les sèves en tumulte écartent les écorces,
Autour de moi la ruche invisible bourdonne,
Et, frêle comme un jonc dans le fleuve des forces,
Je doute en fléchissant de mon âme immortelle :
O nuit, le temps s'écoule, et je ne suis qu'un homme !

Plus faible et sanglotant qu'au jour de mon baptême,
Je pense à vous qui, hauts et droits, ô mes ancêtres,
Vécûtes avec l'âme et la force des cèdres.
La voix du Créateur sur vos fibres vibrantes
Chantait comme un vent pur dans les rameaux sonores.
Votre cœur large et pur s'ouvrait comme une grange ;
Vous aimiez l'oraison du pauvre à votre porte,
Et votre foi d'enfants pleurait sur l'Évangile.
Béni soit notre pain de chaque jour, bénies
La journée et la nuit, disiez-vous, et la vie
Coulait pour vous comme une eau claire sur l'argile.

L'été brûlait; et vous veniez avec l'épouse
Vous asseoir où je suis, aux heures où le jour
S'enfuit en ne laissant au ciel que des étoiles.
Alors le vieux désir humain joignait les bouches.
Sans penser que la mort est au fond de l'amour,
Vous laissiez puissamment tressaillir dans vos moelles
La saine volupté qui fait les fortes races.
Plus tard, quand, jardinier ridé, l'Automne passe,
Vous voyiez à vos bras les enfants se suspendre
Comme un bouquet de fruits dorés après la branche.
Simples et droits, ô mes ancêtres, vous portiez
Des âmes que le soir de la chair trouvait grandes.

Large ivresse! J'entends chuchoter les halliers,
Et la terre en amour rit au céleste abîme.
Le temps plane sur moi comme un aigle immobile.
Je voudrais me confondre avec les choses, tordre
Mes bras contre la pierre et les fraîches écorces,
Être l'arbre, le mur, le pollen et le sel,
Et me dissoudre au fond de l'être universel.
Je ne veux pas de femme en pleurs sur ma poitrine:
Toute chair à ma bouche a le goût du péché,
Et mon cœur est amer comme un fruit desséché.
Que Dieu jette son nom sonore à la ravine,
Et mon esprit, coteau pierreux et désolé,
Ne rendra pas l'écho des paroles divines.

C'est que dans l'ivre et large émoi des belles nuits
Où tout bruit, palpite et soupire à la fois,
Où le silence même a sa rumeur, les voix
Couvrent la mélodie absolue; et l'esprit
Qu'on a tenu penché trop longtemps sur la foi
S'y trouble comme un clair visage au fond d'un puits.
Celui qui frappe au seuil et prie avec des larmes
Se voit un étranger qu'aucun hôte n'accueille;
On se sent faible; on tremble, on doute que son âme
Dans la création pèse plus que la feuille;
On craint que la clarté divine ne soit plus

Qu'une dernière étoile au cœur des hommes purs.
Le monde est triste et vieux, et les nouveaux venus
Pour qui le ciel est vain comme un mot inconnu
Ont recouché le Christ dans son sépulcre obscur.

Mais je veux, ô mon Dieu, malgré tout, croire en toi.
Prête-moi la candeur de la vierge et la foi
De l'enfant. Que je sois vigilant, bon et simple.
Accorde-moi sur tous les dons l'humilité,
Afin que j'offre au vent de ta volonté sainte
Le docile et profond émoi d'un champ de blé.
Permets-moi d'oublier qu'un soir des temps anciens
Le doute déborda du calice divin.
Enfin rends à mon cœur la jeunesse d'aimer ;
Que le grain germe encor dans ce jardin fermé !
Je cherche en égaré ta croix au carrefour,
Je t'appelle à travers la nature vivante ;
Il est temps de m'entendre, ô Dieu ! ne sois pas sourd,
Réconforte mon âme obscure, ta servante,
Car, pareille à l'abîme étoilé de l'amour,
L'immensité des cieux nocturnes m'épouvante.

[*Le Cœur Solitaire.*

AUGUSTE ANGELLIER

1848

M. Angellier, who was born at Dunkirk and educated at Boulogne and at Louis-le-Grand in Paris, has devoted most of his life, since the great War in which he served as a volunteer, to English scholarship. At different public schools, at the Universities of Douai and Lille where he long held the chair of English, and more recently at the Higher Normal School of the Rue d'Ulm, he had a very brilliant academical career, and his reputation, not only as a stimulating master but as a great humanist, has crossed the Channel. His well-known study of the Life and Works of Robert Burns (1889, 1893), a monument of interpretative sympathy and solid, unpedantic learning which contains without irrelevance a whole theory of poetical expression, and reflects a sane, tender and robust humanity, has long been accepted as authoritative.

Apart from a few contributions to periodicals, M. Angellier published no verse before 1896, when *A l'Amie perdue*, which has been called a romance in sonnet-form, appeared. Its remarkable technical qualities imply a patient if secret apprenticeship to the craft of verse. The interest is mainly psychological, but the work is full of delicate descriptions which attune the quiet landscape of the North of France to all the vicissitudes of a moving story, told with the noblest reticence, of a passion and a renouncement. A collection of short lyrics followed, in which a minute study of nature seized in the most particular and evanescent effects of seasons and elements is not less apparent than a resourceful suppleness of form, a familiar grace, a candid and vigorous philosophy of life. Three parts, so far, have since appeared of a graver and more important work, *Dans la Lumière Antique*. The dialogues on love, on the civic spirit, on nature, which compose the two first volumes are likely to fill a considerable place in contemporary poetry. The older taste for dissertations in verse is associated, by ill fortune, with solemn platitudes and the shameless nudity of tedious abstractions; but in M. Angellier's poetry reason is winged and the virtues and the affections are embodied; the tone is natural, and wisdom, pure of all magisterial taint, is conveyed in concrete and compelling images. He has abandoned dialogue in his latest volume, in which the atmosphere is still that of a venerable civilisation.

Of all the French poets whose talent has emerged during the last twenty years, M. Angellier seems almost alone to have escaped the contagion of symbolism. The vogue of a school was little likely, indeed, to tempt his maturity, but his art has unquestionably profited by all the experiments of a century. Extreme tenacity of vision distinguishes him, a generous vocabulary, above all the gift of sympathy. 'Corot, c'est un homme qui sait s'asseoir,' was said of the great painter: it might be said as truly of this accomplished poet. He is incapable of an insincere posture: he is also definite, in form as well as in spiritual intention; and if his lines have by no means the unyielding surface of the Parnassians and he accepts the reasonable reforms which reconcile French prosody once again with the spoken language, he handles the traditional instrument with as much probity as distinction.

All M. Angellier's poetry is published by Hachette.

A l'Amie perdue (1896); *Le Chemin des Saisons* (1903); *Dans la Lumière Antique: Les Dialogues d'Amour* (1905); *Les Dialogues Civiques* (1906); *Les Épisodes*, i. (1908).

The Clarendon Press has published a volume of selections from his writings, prose and verse: *Pages choisies*, with an Introduction in French from the pen of M. A. Legouis (Oxford, 1908).

CXXXI

La Grêle

Les légers grêlons de la grêle
Bondissent sur le bord des toits;
Leur chute claire s'amoncèle,
Au pied des murs, en tas étroits;

Parfois, se heurtant aux parois,
Un grain rejaillit et sautèle
Sur les pavés mouillés et froids,
Comme une blanche sauterelle.

Le sol un instant étincelle,
Argenté de ce fin gravois;
Les légers grêlons de la grêle
Bondissent sur le bord des toits.

[*Le Chemin des Saisons*: Printemps.

CXXXII

L'Habitude

La tranquille Habitude aux mains silencieuses
Panse, de jour en jour, nos plus grandes blessures;
Elle met sur nos cœurs ses bandelettes sûres,
Et leur verse sans fin ses huiles oublieuses;

Les plus nobles chagrins, qui voudraient se défendre,
Désireux de durer pour l'amour qu'ils contiennent,
Sentent le besoin cher et dont ils s'entretiennent
Devenir, malgré eux, moins farouche et plus tendre;

Et, chaque jour, les mains endormeuses et douces,
Les insensibles mains de la lente Habitude
Resserrent un peu plus l'étrange quiétude
Où le mal assoupi se soumet et s'émousse;

Et du même toucher dont elle endort la peine,
Du même frôlement délicat qui repasse
Toujours, elle délustre, elle éteint, elle efface,
Comme un reflet, dans un miroir, sous une haleine,

Les gestes, le sourire et le visage même
Dont la présence était divine et meurtrière:
Ils pâlissent couverts d'une fine poussière,
La source des regrets devient voilée et blême.

A chaque heure apaisant la souffrance amollie,
Otant de leur éclat aux voluptés perdues,
Elle rapproche ainsi, de ses mains assidues,
Le passé du présent, et les réconcilie;

La douleur s'amoindrit pour de moindres délices;
La blessure adoucie et calme se referme;
Et les hauts désespoirs, qui se voulaient sans terme,
Se sentent lentement changés en cicatrices;

Et celui qui chérit sa sombre inquiétude,
Qui verserait des pleurs sur sa douleur dissoute,
Plus que tous les tourments et les cris vous redoute,
Silencieuses mains de la douce Habitude.

[*Le Chemin des Saisons*: Automne.

NOTES

I

THE rimes are poor and all (except *Épidaure*) foreseen. The superstition of a distinct poetical vocabulary haunted Millevoye—whence *bocage* and *pampre* and *pâtre* and *mausolée*.

13. The 'oracle of Epidaurus,'—*i.e.* the doctor's opinion—is fatal at least to the reputation of the poem. Aesculapius had a temple at Epidaurus in Argolis.

II

1. *Boule*, 'sphere.'

2. *Chétif*. By a natural association of ideas the word *captivum* took the meaning 'poor, weakly, pitiful' in the mouths of Gaulish provincials. The old sense subsists in the learned form *captif*. Cf. Italian *cattivo*.

10. *Éclabousse*. This word is a good instance of what is often called contamination or 'crossing.' The old French *esbousser* (from *bouse*) has been altered under the influence of *éclater*. Cf. *meugler* (=*mugir*+*beugler*) *virelai* (=*vireli*+*lai*); and our 'sweet*heart*,' originally 'sweetard,' the last syllable being simply a common termination, modified by confusion with 'heart.'

13. *Morgue tranchante*, 'peremptory pride.' The origin of *morgue* is unknown.

29. The omission of the article before *beauté touchante* has a slightly archaic effect.

30. *Pâtir* was taken directly from Lat. *pati* by learned men: in the popular language deponent forms all disappeared. There is no reason for the circumflex.

III

There was a popular superstition that a little man in red haunted the Tuileries, appearing whenever a sovereign was to be removed. This song was composed and circulated on the eve of the Revolution of 1830.

The metrical scheme of each strophe is 5858668856.

1. The origin of the exclamation *foin*, 'fie!' is not known.

9, 10. *Paradis—dix*: a conventional rime, *dix* here being pronounced *diss*.

18. *Remû-ménage*, on the same principle as *dénûment*, *remercîment*, etc.,

because *e* mute when not elided cannot stand after a vowel within a line.

22-24. The Emigration of 1792.

26. The little man in red always dresses according to the spirit of the hour.

32. *Gouttière*, 'eaves.'

42. *Plus n'y pensais*, archaic for *je n'y pensais plus;* but the pronoun is still popularly omitted in many instances, *e.g.* 'connais pas!'

IV

The scheme is 83488 in most of the strophes; 83588 in the 5th, 6th, 11th, 12th and 13th.

1. *Bateleurs*, 'tumblers,' from the old verb *basteler.*

27. *Grimoire* (*grimaire*) is a variant of *grammaire* (masculine because it stands for *un livre de . . .*). A grammar-book being in Latin was readily confounded with 'black art' books in the Middle Ages: omne ignotum pro venefico! The form of the first syllable may be accounted for by 'dissimilation,' *i.e.* the tendency to avoid repeating a sound (*grammatica*, *gramarie*); or the stages may have been: **gramatica*, *gremaire*, *grémaire*, *grimaire.* (The *r* is not fully explained; but cf. *medicum : mire.*)

31. It is characteristic that Béranger's gipsies should know the Greek mythology.

33. *Gaiement* is usually spelled *gaîment* in verse. *Vide* III. 18.

38. '*Though* we be banished from the town.'

46-50. The stay-at-home, with his eye fixed on the weather-cock of his parish steeple, is no true philosopher.

65. The origin of *carabin*, 'saw-bones,' is not known: the termination is common to several cant names for professions—*rapin*, *robin* (*robe*), *calotin*, etc.

V

The natural discontent of Napoleon's old soldiers was exasperated in the first years of the Restoration by the distribution of commissions among the gilded youth whose only recommendation was that their fathers had emigrated. There is a brilliant passage on the feeling in the army at this time in one of the public letters of Paul-Louis Courier. This dramatic farewell of the veteran marching out to be shot for striking his officer has genuine pathos.

7. *L'exercice*, 'drill.'

13. *Morveux*, a contemptuous word for a 'youngster': literally it means one who runs at the nose (*morve* = 'pituite').

14. *Je lui fends*, sc. *le ventre*, *la tête* or something similar.

24. *Bousculer*, 'to hustle,' is for *boute-culer—bouter cul.*

34. *Appas*, 'charms,' is properly the plural of *appât*, 'bait' (*appastum*), but is sometimes treated as a singular.

VI

Among the incidental consequences of Napoleon's fall, none was felt more keenly as a wound to the national pride than the loss of the artistic spoils from Italy, Germany and the Low Countries with which the wars of the Revolution and the Empire had enriched the Louvre. No less than 5233 works of art, among them 2000 paintings, were claimed by the Allies and restored to the countries from which they had been taken. The Medicean Venus, the Venus of the Capitol, and the Apollo Belvedere, were among the famous statues removed, and the pictures lost to France included almost the whole collection of so-called *Primitifs*.

5. *Nos libérateurs*, the Allies, in ironical deference to the fiction by which the Bourbons and their supporters strove to palliate a foreign victory.

6. *Chars*, i.e. the vans that were to remove the treasures.

11. Leo the Tenth (John de' Medici, second son of the Magnificent), whose apostolate coincided with the most brilliant phase of the Renaissance in Italy (1513-21).

13. It is hardly necessary to say that nothing went, at least directly, to England.

18. An invocation to Apollo as the inspirer of Homer and champion of the nine Muses his daughters against the Python. Apollo slaying the Python was chosen by Delacroix many years later as the subject for his fine ceiling in the Galerie d'Apollon.

28. Gnidos in Caria possessed the Aphrodite of Praxiteles.

35. That is, the Medicean Venus is forced to follow the fortunes of war.

43. *Tissus* instead of *robes*, *draps* is characteristic of the 'classical diction.

47. As it happened, nothing by Correggio (1494-1534) nor by Francesco Albani of Bologna (1598-1661) was removed from the Louvre.

50. Pujet (1622-1694), or rather Puget, the most celebrated French sculptor of Lewis XIV.'s reign. Lebrun the painter, whose most conspicuous works in the Louvre are a Crucifixion and a Martyrdom of S. Stephen, was Puget's contemporary, and by no means to be confounded with Mme. Vigée-Lebrun.

51. The great works of Louis David (1748-1825) are in the Salle des Sept Cheminées. His sculptural and declamatory talent dominated French painting for two generations, and he is the last man to whom a return to nature (from the standpoint of nineteenth-century art) can be justly traced. Delavigne's absurd phrase must be understood as an assertion of the obvious truth that David led a reaction against the sophisticated prettiness of Greuze and the roseate frivolity of Boucher. His ideals were large, human and actual, and he is more 'natural' than they in the sense in which the Jacobins playing at Greeks and Romans were sincerer than great ladies playing at shepherdesses. In politics David was an honest man, a regicide and an idolater of Napoleon: he was living in exile at Brussels when the

Messéniennes appeared, and his name was a symbol dear to all the malcontents of the Restoration.

58-61. Canova's Venus (for which Caroline Borghese sat), his Hercules and his Ajax were all removed to Italy in 1816, and are now in the Borghese Palace.

68-70. The allusions are to two famous pictures by Gros, 'Les Pestiférés de Jaffa' (1804) and the Battle of the Pyramids (1810): both are now at Versailles.

71. Gérard's Napoleon at Austerlitz—also at Versailles.

78, 81. 'Le Déluge' and 'Endymion' by Girodet both hang in the Salle des Sept Cheminées.

82. *Némésis* is one of two flying figures in the masterpiece of Prud'hon—sometimes called the André Chénier of French painting—which represents Vengeance and Justice pursuing Crime. The picture was originally painted for the First Criminal Court in the Palais de Justice (1808).

83. *Phèdre* in the 'Phèdre et Hippolyte' of Guérin.

85. David's great picture 'Léonidas aux Thermopyles.' Notice the cleverness of the transition to the broader theme of this and other *Messéniennes:* Gloria victis!

VII

In spite of the fatuity disclosed in the last verse, this little poem is not an unfavourable example of Delavigne's elegance and Atticism in his lighter work. The Villa is, of course, the celebrated retreat of the Emperor Hadrian at Tibur (Tivoli), in which the masterpieces of Greek art were accumulated.

VIII

There is the vehemence, and indeed the incoherency, of real passion in this outburst; it is a pity it ends with a *fancy* which, if graceful in itself, is become a mere commonplace of amatory verse, and leaves us cold.

IX

This poem is nothing else but a sigh. Its originality does not consist in the order of the feelings expressed, in the spacious and hazy description, or in the rhythm or the vocabulary—which are purely traditional—but in the *pitch*, the vibrating sincerity, the singing quality of the verse. The reader will notice that several of the rimes are particularly indigent, and several of the epithets superfluous or vague. In default of movement, the poem has the continuity of spontaneous emotion. Lamartine tells us, in one of the romancing notes appended in later editions to his poetry, that 'L'Isolement' was written one evening in the autumn of 1819, on a hill overlooking his father's house at Milly, where he read the sonnets of Petrarch and thought of the friend he had lost the year before. It is easier to trace the influence of Racine than that of Petrarch in the poem. The poet placed

it first 'by birthright' among the *Méditations*, but it does not appear to be really the earliest written of them.

11, 12. There is no *enjambement* here : the comma is deceitful.

17. An inversion.

28. The luminous density of this line gives it a classical nobility.

44. This might really be Racine.

48. A flat, colourless and pretentious line.

XI

The scheme of this Ode is the traditional *ababccdccd*, which is also a favourite with Hugo. It is perhaps worth while to compare it, as one of the great examples of Lamartine's eloquence, with *Mazeppa* (XIX), which resembles it at least in the general conception of a poet's subjection to his own genius.

1. *Ainsi* : the classical formula for introducing a similitude.

21, 22. It is thus reason, the reflective faculty, which transports the poet, and his *senses* which vainly strive to moderate the poetical enthusiasm : a singular idea of 'inspiration,' if we could suppose the poet had exactly weighed the meaning of his words. But in *pensée* no doubt he includes the sensuous spring of the imagination, and *l'instinct des sens* means no more than the shudder of the Delphic priestess when the god descends upon her—*la sainte horreur*, Hugo's *horreur sacrée*.

48-50. Horace, *Od.* iv. 2, 1 :

> **Pindarum quisquis studet aemulari,**
> **Iule, ceratis ope Daedalea**
> **Nititur pinnis, vitreo daturus**
> **Nomina ponto.**

58. For Lamartine, all poetry is strictly 'subjective,' and its source is not the sympathetic imagination which assimilates a world, but the intensity of personal emotions fed by experience of life. Therefore, in effect, he cries : 'You praise our verses, and yet you revile the passionate disorder of our lives which they can only reflect!' It is interesting to compare or rather to contrast this apology (which leads directly to the doctrine of irresponsible genius) with the evidently less sincere pretext upon which Victor Hugo was, later on, to justify the derelictions of Olympio as increasing the scope of his spiritual experience, and therefore profitable to humanity (*Les Voix Intérieures* : A Olympio).

72. *Lâches*, 'feeble.'

80-90. The inconsistency of this last strophe is only apparent. Life is more than the poetry which reflects life and feeds upon it! *Tu* in l. 81 is M. Rocher, an intimate friend of the poet's in early life, who rose to distinction in a judicial career. 'One of my friends,' says the note to this poem, 'came in just as I was finishing the last strophe. I read the whole piece to him : it touched him. He copied and carried it off and read it to some classical poets of the time, and they encouraged the unknown poet by

their praise. I dedicated it afterwards to this friend, who himself wrote remarkable verse.'

XII

Those who know nothing else of Lamartine's know *Le Lac*, which fixes one of the eternal commonplaces of all poetry in a sovereign form. The inexorable flow of time is everybody's theme: it has been plausibly conjectured that Rousseau's *Nouvelle Héloïse*, iv. 17, was his model. But unquestionably the occasion of this Elegy, as well as the manner and the tone, was absolutely personal. There are passages in *Raphaël*, the story of his friendship and passion for Madame Charles, there called Julie (though in his verse she shares the name of Elvire with the poet's Neapolitan sweetheart, Graziella), which might almost be called prose renderings of these superb strophes—in chapter xxxv. notably. The lake is the Lac du Bourget near Aix in Savoy: it was there they had met in 1816, and they were to meet again the next autumn; but Madame Charles was already dying, and Lamartine returned to Aix alone and wrote his poem there, calling it first *Ode au Lac du B . . .*

2. The first version (which was published after the poet's death by V. de Laprade) ran: *Sans pouvoir rien fixer, entraînés* sans retour.

5. *O lac!* He had written originally *Beau lac!* These amendments have their importance—especially as Lamartine was, in theory, a poet who never corrected his verse.

21-36. The form of this apostrophe is one of the most beautiful of all French forms, and the special vehicle of elegies. Ronsard used it in some of his first poems, and Malherbe in his most famous piece, the 'Consolation à Du Perrier.'

36. Here followed two amorous strophes beginning

Elle se tut: nos cœurs, nos yeux se rencontrèrent . . .

They were in quite another spirit, and Lamartine was wise enough to sacrifice them to the unity of emotion without which 'Le Lac' would lose its distinction.

38, 40. *Bonheur—malheur*: not a commendable rime; it is too facile, too certainly anticipated. But Lamartine's craftsmanship was not exacting.

XIII

Lamartine's incapacity for self-criticism appears in his characteristic comment upon *Les Préludes*, which he disparages as the diversion of idle virtuosity, excepting only a lyrical interlude inspired by conjugal affection which is precisely the weakest part of a fine production. The eloquent passage transcribed here follows that 'true elegy' after a short parenthesis which contains one memorable line:

L'amour est à l'amour, le reste est au génie.

25, 26. These superb lines are a good example of Lamartine's singular power of wedding his music to his sense in a natural affinity.

XIV

All Lamartine's poetical virtues, harmony, elevation, eloquence, intense sincerity, contribute to the perfection of this Hymn, which wants no commentary. In point of technical accomplishment, it is (like most of the more important poems in *Les Harmonies*) far in advance of anything in *Les Méditations*: the short lines in particular discovering the poet's resourcefulness, constructive skill, and capacity for speed. The great choruses of *Esther* and *Athalie* certainly influenced him—without making the poem less original—in the composition of the earlier part. The scheme of the strophe of five syllables is *ababbaccdeeeed*.

XV

This is one of the few passages of not prohibitive length which it is possible to detach from the long and singularly unequal story of *Jocelyn*. It belongs to the interval between the rescue of Laurence and the crisis of the hero's life. Laurence is still, for Jocelyn, a boy. The fluid and spontaneous eloquence of the apostrophe to physical beauty is perhaps its whole merit.

12. *Flexibles*: I suppose a more delicious epithet for streams has never occurred to a poet: the metaphor it carries with it makes us almost expect that *arbres* shall be particularised by a word evoking a sight of running water. *Gracieux* destroys the balance, and secures the rime.

23, 24. Beauty draws tears to the eye of the beholder, because it is a ray of light too strong to be endured. There is grace in this fancy, which, starting from the expression of an emotion, invents a natural cause to explain what is only in the mind: the mythological faculty of the imagination, on the contrary, sees the soul of man in things.

38. *L'habitante*, sc. *l'âme*.

XVI

This romantic masterpiece in which the glory of Roncevaux is revived was written when the *Song of Roland* was still a mere name for the French public. Recently, scholars had been giving attention to various *rifacimenti* of relative antiquity; but the epic in the form in which we know it was not recovered until 1837, when Francisque Michel found the oldest complete manuscript existing in the Bodleian at Oxford. It will hardly be necessary to remind the reader that the historical foundation for the heroic legend is the surprise and defeat by Basque peasants, in a pass on the Spanish side of the Pyrenees, of the rear-guard of Charlemagne's army returning from a victorious campaign, commanded by Roland, prefect of the Breton marches. He was not the Emperor's nephew, and only two men of any rank perished with him. The date was the 15th of August 778.

1. Cf. *Hernani*, v. 3 (Doña Sol:) Oh! que j'aime bien mieux le cor au fond des bois!

The horn, symbolical and decorative, has come to be considered as a sort of Romantic 'property.'

> C'était le temps du patchouli, des Janissaires,
> D'Elvire, et des turbans, et des hardis corsaires.
> Byron disparaissait, somptueux et fatal,
> Et le cor dans les bois sonnait sentimental.
>
> A. Samain (*Le Chariot d'Or*).

8. *Paladins.* The word is the Italian *paladino* (*palatinum* : Old French *palaisin* : an officer of the Imperial household), and is quite a modern name in French for the Twelve Peers.

10. The Pic du *Marboré* is not far SE. of Gavarnie, near the so-called Brèche de Roland, and within a day's journey from Luz and Argelès.

12. *Gaves*, the Pyrenean word for mountain-torrents, is apparently the Old French *gave*, 'gullet,' Provençal *gava*, of uncertain origin. The modern verb (*se*) *gaver* comes from the Provençal.

49. *Troubadour*, for a minstrel of Charlemagne's time, is a verbal anachronism.

55. *Housses*, our *house*, *housings* (saddle-cloth), is conjectured to be the Arabic *ghushia.*

56. Turpin, the great medieval type of the warrior prelate, plays a different part in the *Song of Roland* : he dies with all the Christian host.

59. The Saints are always *Monsieur* (*Messire*) or *Monseigneur* in the literature of the Middle Ages.

64. *Destrier.* This very ancient word for a charger comes from *destre* (Lat. *dextera*). A squire led his knight's horse with the *right* hand. *Destrier* had only two syllables in old poetry.

XVII

Vigny would have been too ill represented without at least some portion of *La Maison du Berger.* The first division of the poem (which has three) has been selected at some risk of leaving an impression of incoherence. Tired of the smoke and vanity of cities, the poet invites an ideal mistress to a life of roving contemplation ; and the shepherd's hut that is to be their caravan becomes the symbol of a spiritual solitude which is not so much detachment from human struggles as a refuge whence outcast poetry may at least watch the universal flux undismayed by the mediocrity of men or the indifference of nature. The superb digression on railways is followed in the second part by a more comprehensive protest against the antilyrical spirit, and the degeneracy of poetry, the 'daughter of Saint Orpheus.'

9. *Le boulet*, that is, the weight attached to a convict's chain.

14. *La lettre sociale*, the initial with which (like our broad arrow) society brands the criminal.

29-35. *Encensoirs—reposoirs* (the little altars in a street where the Host

rests in a procession): see how this great poet creates an atmosphere of devotion with two words!

36-42. The Twilight goes to sleep—and yet casts his grey mantle over the banks. Yet the figure is animate and persuades us, and this stanza has a singular beauty.

72. *Ne plane et la défend.* For the omission of the second negative, compare line 101: '(à moins que) . . . la France nous convie.'

83. Has not the poet confounded the brazen bull of Phalaris with the Moloch worshipped at Carthage and elsewhere under the image of a bull and often propitiated by human sacrifices?

128. *Y*: sc. 'au calcul,' or perhaps 'à la science.'

XVIII

In this poem Vigny's characteristic stoicism receives its final expression, and the last lines are a sort of poetical testament. He rarely attained in narrative the free and varied movement which distinguishes especially the first part of *La Mort du Loup*, which is full of formal beauties.

5. *Brandes.* Nobody knows the origin of this word which is used in the West of France for a sort of heath and a sort of heather. It is at least as old as the twelfth century, and may be Gaulish or pre-Gallic.

6. Great tracts of unprofitable land in the South-west have been reclaimed in the last hundred years by vast plantations of firs and pines.

XIX

Byron's fine poem gave Hugo his subject, and no more: Byron's is merely a vivid narrative, Hugo's masterpiece is an elaborate similitude between the material sufferings of Mazeppa's ride and the torments of genius—the nightmare of inspiration. The two poems can hardly be compared save in respect of *movement*. Byron's *Mazeppa* has plenty of movement, but Hugo's unquestionably gives a stronger impression of breathless speed. It has amplitude, it presents a splendid series of pictures, and its variety of rhythm is remarkable. Yet the classical hemistich is for the most part still present—more constantly at least than in some poems of the same collection. Byron (and through him, Hugo) was indebted to Voltaire's *Histoire de Charles XII.* for the story—on which doubt has been thrown—of Mazeppa, the hetman of Cossacks, and his punishment.

1. *Ainsi.* At this early stage Hugo keeps the consecrated formula, as did Lamartine (*v.* xi.).

20. *Ouragan*, our 'hurricane,' is a Caribbean word. Observe how, in comparing the horse and his rider to a storm, the poet uses the most material word to describe its gathering: *s'entasser* is more than 'to gather' (*tas*, a pile, a bundle).

28. There is perhaps a timid approach here to a *coupe ternaire* which, if more plainly intended, would be exceptionally audacious: 2 + 7 + 3.

41. *Cavales* (from Italian *cavalla*), for *juments*, is a poetical word: the romantics have their superstitions like the classics! Possibly they believed they were reviving the real feminine of *cheval*. It has an aesthetic value certainly. There is a verb recently formed from it: *se cavaler* or *cavaler*, 'to scamper off.'

43-48. See how some worn metaphors are brilliantly revived in this one strophe. The evening not merely *advances*—its strides grow longer; the sun does more than *pierce* the clouds—the clouds are an ocean, wave on wave, and the sun a ship which cleaves them with its prow; and Mazeppa feels everything 'go round and round'—the sky itself is a wheel, like marble with its streaks of golden light.

61. *Le grand duc*, the old name for the eagle owl (*bubo ignavus*). The long-eared owl is sometimes called *moyen duc* and the short-eared *petit duc*. The name was apparently suggested by their tufts or egrets.

62. *Orfraie* for *osfraie*, Latin *ossifraga*, 'bone-breaker': our 'osprey.' In his later works the osprey has a moral significance for Victor Hugo and is often contrasted with the eagle.

68. *Yeuse*, 'evergreen oak,' is probably a Southern form, representing popular Latin *ĭlicem* for *īlicem*. The *y* counts as a syllable.

86. *Érable* is the popular Latin *acerarborem* (*acer*, 'maple'), the last *r* becoming *l* as in *tempora—temple* (our 'temple'), now *tempe*.

109. *Chenues* (*canutum*), 'hoary,' *i.e.* snow-capped.

124-126. The tireless flight of genius constantly extends the bounds of the worlds imagined.

133, 134. *Implacable—l'accable.* An imperfect rime—a : â. *Accabler* is pronounced *accâbler* because the *a* was originally double, *accaabler* (*ad, cadabla* for *catabula*, καταβολή). It has nothing to do with *câble*, which is *capulum*, 'a halter.'

XX

The feeling expressed in the second stanza is not arrogance—the arrogance of the seer which is so characteristic of the later Hugo: it is rather the sudden suspicion that he is alone in the universe—a metaphysical terror that perhaps invades most souls at times.

XXI

The qualities and the vices of the pure Romantic ballad are typically displayed in this hackneyed *romance*. Gastibelza's complaint is vague, incoherent, windy and theatrical: but the form is delightful and the momentary illusion, thanks to many charming details, is complete, and it is hard to say whether the burden is more delicious or absurd.

5, 9. In order to find so many words in *-agne* the poet was bound to admit a few imperfect rimes. The *a* in *gagne* is a close *â*. *Dame—âme* (below, ll. 41, 43) has not this excuse.

11. *Maugrabine* is an old popular form for *margravine*, borrowed directly from the German *Markgräfin*.

45. *Bagne*, the Italian *bagno*, 'bath'—after a bath in Constantinople which was converted into a gaol. We used to speak of 'bagnios' in English, with another meaning.

61. *César, empereur d'Allemagne* is an adroit counterfeit of popular anachronism.

62. *Licou* or *licol*, 'halter,' is simply *lie-col*, 'neck-tie.'

74, 76. *Las—hélas!* Nobody now says *lasse* for *las*, nobody says *héla* for *hélas*: but a century before every one said *héla*, and a great deal earlier no doubt the *s* was sounded in both words.

77. *La Cerdagne*, Cerdaña, a district on the Spanish side of the Pyrenees just south of the vale of Andorra.

86. *Au clou*—that is, hung up and useless.

XXII

In spite of the early date assigned to it by the poet, it is at least probable that this graceful little poem, which only saw the light in 1856, and closely resembles many pieces in *Chansons des Rues et des Bois* in form and spirit, was rehandled if not rewritten long after 1830. The word *coccinelle* is borrowed directly from the Latin *coccinellus*, diminutive of *coccinus*, κόκκινος, 'scarlet-red': *cochenille*, our 'cochineal,' is the Spanish *cochinilla*.

19. A play on the popular name for the lady-bird: *bête au bon Dieu*.

XXIII

This poem breathes the very spirit of Greek art and Greek mythology. It is sober, serene, limpid;—and, but for the word *atrium* in the first line which introduces a Roman thing into a Greek picture, it would be absolutely flawless. What a superb idea is this of the monsters subdued by the hero gazing abashed at the spinning-wheel of Omphale, the symbol of a passion which has conquered their conqueror—'le vainqueur du vainqueur de la terre'!

XXIV

'Soir,' first printed posthumously in 1888 in the first volume of *Toute la Lyre*, was apparently written in March 1846, the date assigned to the equally fine but much longer poem 'Nuit,' which follows it in that collection. Victor Hugo commanded the sources of fear and wonder; and something of his wizardry is exhibited in this poem. It contains also admirable examples of the art of prolonging (apparently) the shorter measures, by suspension (l. 17) and by condensation (l. 45).

10, 12. *Eaux—chaos*. The rime gives us the choice between *os* and *cahots*!

35, 36. All the effect in these lines, as in the following stanza, is due to the alternation of words reproducing particular sensations or representing palpable objects with a phrase intentionally vague and reticent.

41. *Élîtres*, better *élytres* = ἔλυτρα, the 'wing-cases' of certain insects.

XXV

In the second series of *Les Contemplations*, the whole of the first book, 'Pauca Meae,' is consecrated to the memory of Léopoldine Hugo (Mme. Charles Vacquerie). This poem, written while the feeling of revolt against the blow was still uppermost, and ostensibly an answer to friends who would have persuaded him to resume all his activities, set at rest, for ever, the question whether Victor Hugo had 'a heart.' Beautiful in form as it is, there are slight flaws (for instance, the weak rime *aurore—encore* occurs twice in the space of not very many lines) which afford the strongest possible proof of the poet's absorption in his grief. The spirit of 'Trois Ans après' contrasts strongly with that of 'A Villequier,' the poem of resignation, which is still finer, but of prohibitive length.

XXVI

I have inserted these few lines because, without some specimen of the more philosophical portions of *Les Contemplations*, Victor Hugo would be too imperfectly represented : the most interesting and the most harmonious poems of the sixth book are unfortunately much too long to find a place here. The reader will at least see examples, in these two strophes, of Hugo's invariable habit of translating the objects of pure thought into terms of the imagination.

XXVII

These lines stand at the head of the first book of *Les Châtiments* : no preface could be more impressive than this is in its density and dignity of thought, its monumental diction and its prophetic vehemence.

XXVIII

The metrical scheme is :

12 a 12 a 12 b 12 c 8 c 12 b 12 d 8 d 8 b

12. *Greffe* (*graphium*), 'registry' of a court or a prison : *greffier* is the registrar, or clerk of the court. The plural *graphia* has given the feminine word *greffe*, 'graft.'

18. *Écrou* is the book in which prisoners are entered : it may or may not be the same word as *écrou*, our 'screw.'

21. Achille *Fould*, a Jewish banker and member of parliament, in all probability financed Louis Bonaparte in preparation for the *Coup d'État* ; he was several times finance minister under the Empire and had an ugly reputation. General *Magnan*, Governor of Paris, was aware of the conspiracy, but took no active part in it until the moment for action, when he superintended the 'restoration of peace' in the streets of Paris (3rd, 4th, and 5th December 1851). The Marquis (afterwards Duke) de *Morny*, Louis Bonaparte's half-brother, was minister of the interior : he was a man of some talent, a favourite in society, and a gambler on the stock exchange.

The poet's portrait of Morny in *L'Histoire d'un Crime*, whether accurate or not, is a masterpiece. *Maupas*, prefect of police, was a young man of family, very ambitious. He and Morny, with Mocquard, the Prince-president's secretary, Fialin de Persigny, his most disinterested friend, and Saint-Arnaud, the Minister of War, were the five chiefs of the conspiracy.

31. *Pontons*: the prison-hulks at Toulon, filled with political prisoners after the success of the *Coup d'État*.

41. Strictly, perhaps, there should be no *s* in the plural of *porte-sabre* and *porte-mitre*.

42. *Étau* is *not* another form of *étal*; it is really *étoc* (=*estoc*, 'stump, stock, rapier') wrongly spelt, the plural *estocs* having been confounded with *estaux*, the plural of *estal*, when the two words sounded exactly alike.

43. *Étrivière*, 'lash,' is properly a stirrup-strap (*étrier*).

48. *Goëmon*, 'sea-weed,' is a Breton word.

48. The descriptive beauty of this line and of all this strophe is in effective contrast with the passionate invective, and the proper names against which it is directed, in the preceding strophes.

XXIX

The Black Hunter is apparently the Wild Hunter of German legend, the *wütende Jäger* in whose name Grimm recognised a distortion of the god Wuotan's. In this wonderful lyric he symbolises at once the Avenging Spirit of liberty and the people of France. The metrical scheme is alternately :—

8 a 8 a 4 b 8 a 4 b
10 a 5 b 10 a 5 b 10 a 5 b

The decasyllables have the division after the fifth syllable.

XXX

His banishment, which added more than one string to the lyre of Victor Hugo, made him a great poet of the sea—almost exclusively, as might be expected from his temperament, the poet of the sea in its terrible aspects. It is not 'the sea, my mother,' of Mr. Swinburne, that he sings in this magnificent poem, or in *Travailleurs de la Mer*, or in 'Les Paysans au bord de la Mer,' 'L'Océan,' 'Pleine Mer' and other sea-pieces of *La Légende des Siècles*. Here especially his imagination which, more than the imagination of any other poet, revels in the creation of myth, endows not only the sea, but every wave of the sea, the squall, the ship, the sea-line, the yards and the anchor, with animate existence and a human will.

23. *Enclume* represents *incudinem*, classical *incudem*. For the parasitical *l* compare English and Old French *syllable*; and for the *m*, *charme* (*carpinum*) and *Drôme* (*Druna*).

25. *Hydre écaillée*, cf. XXVIII. 49 : l'énorme océan, hydre aux écailles vertes.

28. *Maniaque* has not the same shade of meaning as our word 'maniac':

it is applied to the victim of an insane obsession, a fixed idea, rather than to a raving madman (*fou furieux, forcené*).

50. *Vergue*, 'yard,' is another form of *verge*.

51. *Cabestan*, whence our 'capstan,' is a Provençal word, connected with the Latin *capistrare*.

56. *Tangage*, the 'pitching' of a vessel as opposed to the rolling.

57. *Hune*, 'bell-beam': *la grande hune* is the main top. It is a word of Scandinavian origin, as is also *foc*, 'jib' (or triangular sail).

67. *Cale*, 'the hold,' and the verb *caler*, 'to sink, to drop, to strike (a mast),' come from the Italian *callare*, which appears to be the Greek χαλᾶν.

72. *Beaupré*, from the English, 'bowsprit.'

75. *Urgel* was a hairy giant slain by Tristan in the Breton legends of Tristan and Isolt; but the poet means *Urgèle* (*Urgel* in the Breton), one of the Nine Sister-Spirits of Celtic legend, whose home was the Isle of Sein, and of whom the mightiest was Mor-gen. *Morgan* or Morgane (Italian *Morgana*) is for Morgain, the Old French corruption of Mor-gen, from which a subject-case, Morgue, was formed. According to Geoffrey of Monmouth's Life of Merlin, Morgue sheltered Arthur from his foes, healed his wounds and kept him a prisoner. She is also represented as Arthur's sister and the enemy of Guinevere. In later romances she became a fairy, and to her was attributed the well-known phenomenon of atmospheric refraction observed particularly in the Straits of Messina and called Fata Morgana.

XXXI

This hymn now stands at the very beginning of *La Légende des Siècles*, after the Vision. It was not published, however, until 1877, with the second series.

46-48. These sententious lines are exceedingly characteristic of Hugo's apophthegmatic manner, and perhaps they express all that he held most permanently in politics.

56. The rhythm is remarkable (5 + 3 + 4).

100-102. An excellent example of Hugo's art of ending nobly—without the vulgarity of a noisy *climax*.

XXXII

One of the well-known pearls of *La Légende*. Apart from the absolute perfection of the verse, it owes everything to the subtle evocation of an atmosphere. Very little in 'Booz endormi' is borrowed from the Bible. It has been conjectured that the entire poem sprang from the impression left upon the poet's mind by a sight of the moon one night looking like 'a sickle in a field of stars.' Much of the effect of simplicity is obtained here by short words—but without the *niaiserie* of Tennyson's 'Dora' or so much of Wordsworth.

4. *Boisseaux*: thence our 'bushel.'

14. Compare Tennyson's 'Wearing the white flower of a blameless life.'

19-24. Some characteristic antitheses.

26. The effect of the 'ascending' rhythm (3+4+5) is strangely beautiful.

32. There are phrases both of Bossuet and of Diderot which may have suggested this line.

37-40. The tree of Jesse, a favourite subject of medieval and Renaissance sculpture.

43. *Quatre-vingt* for *quatrevingts*: the *s* is only dropped before another number.

51, 52. Magnificent lines, where all are fine.

53. *Bouleau*, 'birch,' is the diminutive of the obsolete *boule*: a Gaulish word (like *chêne*), which, however, as in almost every case, passed through a Latin form (*betullum*) to become French.

67. From this point onwards, every line, every word almost, contributes an inimitable touch to the effectiveness of the illusion. This is more than word-painting: Hugo's words make us both feel and see, with their complex associations and their concrete wealth.

69. What an atmosphere there is in this one word *nuptiale*.

70-72. This phrase, or this fancy, must have haunted Hugo, for we find in a short poem of *Les Contemplations* ('Pauca Meae,' x.), over the date 'Avril 1847':

> On ne peut distinguer, la nuit, les robes bleues
> Des anges frissonnants qui glissent dans l'azur.

81. *Jérimadeth*, which yields the most unexpected of rimes—one however which depends on a hypothetical pronunciation—is a pure invention of the poet's.

XXXIII

'Cassandre' only appeared in 1877. It has surely much of the Greek dramatic spirit, serene and terrible.

XXXIV

This marvellous song comes from the masterpiece called 'Éviradnus,' which tells how an aged knight-errant rescued Mahaud, heiress of Lusatia, from the hands of two greedy potentates in disguise. Joss, who sings, is the Emperor Sigismund: Zeno, his companion, is King Ladislas of Poland (the historical pretext is of the flimsiest).

XXXVI

The song which Fantine sings (near the end of the First Book in *Les Misérables*) from her bed in the house of the 'Mayor of M—— sur ——.'

XXXVIII

Written during the siege of Paris. The poet did die in the time of roses, fourteen years later. I believe he was absolutely sincere in calling himself *un bonhomme clément*: moreover, at bottom it was true.

XXXIX

Perhaps Jeanne's Norman nurse may have given a suggestion for this song: the setting is partly Norman (Avranches, Fougères), partly Breton (*biniou*, the Breton bag-pipe; and Maître Yvon's name).

13. *Lippe*, 'blubber-lip' (Germanic).

19. *Chasse-marées* are small coasting vessels, generally lugger-rigged. The plural should be *les chasse-marée*.

XL

The structure is original. There is something in the incoherent charm of this song that may remind English readers of Browning and the songs in *Pippa Passes*.

XLI

Notice that this celebrated and enchanting little poem translates into words the visual associations of a melody: it describes, and therefore it is not itself, a piece of symbolism. I do not know whether the music is the well-known *gavotte* attributed to King Lewis XIII. himself.

2. *Wèbre*, which does not shift the stress of the German, was the French pronunciation of the name when Weber was at the height of his popularity in France. Most French people nowadays say *Wébère*.

7. *Louis* has one syllable here: usually it has two in verse.

XLII

El Desdichado means 'The Unfortunate' in Spanish. 'Un goût de cacher un sens mystérieux sous d'humbles mots, l'essai d'une esthétique,' which M. de Gourmont remarks as the characteristic of all *Les Chimères*, is particularly evident in this sonnet. Externally limpid, but laden with secret associations, it seems to interpret obscurely the torment of a nostalgic imagination which harks back at once to the gods of Greece and to the Middle Ages, under the influence of the Neapolitan sky.

2. I cannot identify this Prince of Aquitaine—there were many. Possibly the allusion is to the troubadour Jauffré Rudel, Prince of Blaye in Aquitaine, the hero of a poem of Browning's and of M. Rostand's *Princesse Lointaine*, among other works. His love for the unseen Lady of Tripoli has been shown by Gaston Paris to be a myth engendered by a phrase of his own poetry.

4. Some lines from an early poem of Gérard's may perhaps help to unravel the thought here :

> Quiconque a regardé le soleil fixement
> Croit voir devant ses yeux voler obstinément
> Autour de lui, dans l'air une tache livide.
> Ainsi, tout jeune encore et plus audacieux,
> Sur la gloire un instant j'osai fixer les yeux :
> Un point noir est resté dans mon regard avide.

7. This mystic flower is perhaps that which he elsewhere calls

> Rose au cœur violet, fleur de Sainte Gudule.

9. It might be Guy de *Lusignan*, who bought Cyprus in 1192 from Cœur-de-Lion and founded the family of French Kings of Jerusalem, or Hugues x. who married Isabella of Angoulême, widow of King John, and is the ancestor of the Pembrokes ; or more than one other of this illustrious family. But much more probably, the name is a symbol of glory and adventure. *Biron*, similarly, may not mean any particular person : the most famous men of that house were Armand, who began as a page to Margaret Queen of Navarre and died, a Marshal of France, at the siege of Épernay in 1592 ; or his son Charles, who conspired against Henry IV. with the friends of Spain and the League, and was executed in 1602.

10. The allusion no doubt is to the poet Alain Chartier (1394-1439) who was kissed, it is said, by Margaret of Scotland while asleep.

11. The grotto of Calypso.

12-14. Twice the poet (even as Orpheus went down into Hades) has explored the dead past, bringing back with him an image of paganism and an image of the Christian ages of faith.

XLIII

The sonnet addressed by Tasso (1544-1595) from his prison in Ferrara to the author of the Lusiad (1524-1579) is apparently that beginning

> 'Vasco, le cui felici, ardite antenne,'

and numbered 364 among the 'Rime eroiche' in the great Pisa edition of 1822.

14. *Tortoni*, the great *café glacier* of the Boulevard des Italiens.

XLIV

2. *Gêne* for *Gênes*—a licence : yet etymologically there should be no *s* in *Gênes*.

XLV

The second strophe, though effective, is unessential to the conception of the poem.

XLVI

Sainte-Beuve, in a celebrated piece 'La Rime,' had already revived this delightful form of strophe, dear to poets of the Pléiade and consecrated

especially by Remy Belleau's lovely 'Avril.' Hugo used it in *Les Orientales* ('Sara la baigneuse'). David, called David d'Angers (to distinguish him from Louis David), perhaps the most eminent French sculptor of the Romantic period, was the intimate friend of Victor Hugo and many other poets of that generation (1788-1856).

23, 24. *Il s'y pend*—the act; *il y pend*—the state.

28-30. His loins are more supple even than the branch he pulls down towards him (*ramène*): they are easier to bend, though they bent another way—*en leur sens*, i.e. in their natural *direction*.

40. *Le même serpent qu'on dit qui mordit.* This idiomatic construction, a fusion of *qui, dit-on, mordit* and *que l'on dit avoir mordu*, has no parallel in English. *Qui* has the force of *qu'il*. We should turn the difficulty by parenthesis. But I have known people say 'A friend who*m* I expect will be coming.'

XLVII

This piece is remarkable as an example of a certain deliberate realism or prosaism of which Sainte-Beuve may be called the initiator in modern French poetry. He was in this curious quality the true master of Baudelaire.

XLVIII

The fantastic address (absurdly called a Ballad) to the Moon belongs to the early days when Musset was the spoilt child of Romanticism, sometimes borrowing its garb or aping its postures and quite as often laughing in his sleeve at its extravagances, in much the same spirit as that in which Byron began a canto of his masterpiece with 'Hail, Muse, etc.—We left Juan sleeping.'—This poem is impertinent and charming, buoyant, coloured and witty. In the second edition of Musset's early poems it contained several additional strophes of a licentious character. I have followed the first edition.

14. *Faucheux* or *faucheur*, 'field-spider.'

59. *Prée* is an old alternative form for *pré*: it represented the Latin neuter plural, mistaken for a feminine singular. There are many such cases: *Cor, corne; tourment* and *tourmente; bras* and *brasse*.

XLIX

The caesura is placed after the fifth syllable. Notice the felicitous interplay of the repeated rimes. The philosophy—life is only worth living for the sake of remembering how we have lived—is quite characteristic.

L

Saint-Blaise or 'Sacca di San Biagio' forms virtually part of the island called Giudecca (*Zuecca* in the Venetian dialect): in this poor and populous district of Venice few people would think of gathering verbena!

LI

Les Nuits are unquestionably the most original and the most perfect of Musset's poems. In each of them, except in this 'Nuit de Décembre,' the

poet receives the visit of his Muse who exhorts him to find consolation in poetry for the disillusions of life. If we may trust his brother's testimony, these visits were a kind of hallucination, not merely an allegory. On certain nights when he expected the Muse, he would dress carefully, fill his room with flowers and candles, and watch till all hours for her coming. This poem also, perhaps, owes its conception to some such illusion as that by which the poet Coleridge in an ecstatic moment saw *himself*.

37. *Libertin*, unlike our 'libertine' in its present use, connotes impiety.

38. *Toast*, or *toste*, with the verb *toster*, is of course borrowed from the English; but our word came from the old French *toste*, which is the Latin *tostum*, from *torrere*. There are several similar cases of words recently borrowed from the English which in their original form were French: thus *ticket* is *étiquette*, *sport* is a corruption of *desport*, *budget* is the old word *bougette*, 'a little purse.'

90. *Promener sur une claie* ('hurdle'), was an old form of torture.

LII

This poem, absolutely sincere and really heartrending, belongs to the period when Musset, still a young man, discovered that he was bankrupt of all that made life worth living to him. It reflects the utter dissolution of the will, the demoralisation of the *poète déchu*, who has nothing left him but remembrance.

LIII

1. *La Nuit.* In the Medicean Chapel of San Lorenzo at Florence, Michel Angelo worked from 1520 to 1533 at the tombs of Giuliano and Lorenzo (grandson of the Magnificent): the figures of *Night*, Day, Dawn and Twilight are stretched upon the sarcophagi.

LIV

7. The inversion of the natural order (the verbs here preceding their subject), as also the omission of an article in the next line, are meant to have an archaic effect.

LV

3. *Imbriqué*, *imbricatus* from *imbrex*, 'a gutter-tile.' The shape and the disposition of the tiles give the senses of the (architectural) word 'imbricated.' Gautier means to suggest the *overlapping* of the pieces in a coat of mail.

8. *Brassard*, 'brace.'

15. *Faussées*, 'dented, battered.'

LVI

Every one knows at least the melody to which Gounod set the delightful 'Barcarolle.'

8. *Lest*, 'ballast.'

10. *Mousse*, 'a cabin-boy,' is the Spanish *mozo* rather perhaps than the Italian *mozzo*.

LVII

La Comédie de la Mort, Gautier's deepest creation in verse, narrowly misses being one of the dozen greatest achievements of the century by a certain dissipation in the magnificent imagery with which he drapes the ideas of 'life in death'—or the horror of decay as it would appear to a consciousness imprisoned in a tomb—and of 'death in life,' or the decay of a soul still inhabiting flesh. The poem would be even more impressive were not the pictures so many, so sumptuous and so bewildering. In the second part, the poet, guided not by Virgil but by the figure of Death herself, is admitted to intercourse with illustrious shades, and asks in turn of Faust, of Don Juan, of Napoleon, the eternal question: What is happiness? He who thirsted for knowledge all his life now only regrets love; the insatiable lover holds wisdom the better part; the great conqueror's ideal is a life of pastoral peace. Don Juan's answer forms a complete poem within the poem. Since Tirso de Molina, a Spanish poet of the early seventeenth century, threw into dramatic form, with it seems some elements of a dateless popular tradition, the legend of faithless libertinism left by the scandalous life of Don Juan Tenorio (the original is said to have ended in a cloister), almost every age and every people has made a Don Juan in its own likeness. For some he has been only the type of a vulgar 'lady-killer,' for others the lamentable slave of an ideal passion surviving a thousand illusions; and there is little in common, besides polygamy, between the capricious egoist of Molière's morality, Mozart's lucid and spectral Don Giovanni, and Byron's 'natural man' according to the Regency—to say nothing of the impenitent, stoical lover whom Baudelaire ferried to hell over the waves of his consummate verse. Théophile Gautier has hardly added an individual Don Juan to the list: it is a hedonist whom the pursuit of pleasure has left unsatisfied and who imagines that science would not have deceived him.

15. *Bouvreuil*, the popular Latin *bovariolum*, 'little herdsman.' Our '*bull*-finch' contains something of the same metaphor.

Filon, 'vein.'

97. *Y grec de Pythagore.* I do not know what was Gautier's authority for supposing that Pythagoras used the letter Y as a symbol of dubitation: the shape obviously suggests the analogy of cross-roads. Elsewhere, in a descriptive passage of some ephemeral prose, the French poet speaks of 'l'y du carrefour.'

Rose mystique. The reader will find a succinct account of the Rose as the 'symbol of spiritual love and supreme beauty' in the notes to Mr. Yeats's poems *The Wind among the Reeds.* The flower is sacred to Our Lady in Christian legend; of old it was distinguished in the worship of Isis, and a rose was eaten by the Golden Ass of Apuleius when he was transformed and received into her secret fellowship.

LVIII

Jose Ribera (1588-1652), one of the great Spanish painters of the seventeenth century, was brought up at Valencia but worked and died at Naples, where he was called 'Lo Spagnoletto.' His characteristic manner is sombre, almost sanguinary, grim subjects and a stormy palette; but he relented in some religious pictures. Gautier had in mind, no doubt, the Repentant Magdalen and the Trinity he had seen in the Prado. The spelling *Ribeira* suggests a Portuguese rather than a Spanish name.

24. *Pentélique*, from Pentele, a parish in Attica.

30. *Victimaire*: this unusual word is the Latin *victimarius*, an assistant at sacrifices.

50. *Tournés*, 'soured.

60. *Moelleux*, 'soft, unctuous,' from *moelle*, 'marrow.' *Moelle* is the Latin *medulla*, which became successively *medole*, *meole*, and, by metathesis, *moele*. Till the seventeenth century it was pronounced *mo-ele*, and singularly enough Victor Hugo counts the word as a disyllable in his verse. Later it was sounded as a diphthong (*mwèle*), and when the pronunciation of the diphthong *oi* changed form *wè* to *wa*, *moelle* followed the great number of words in which the vowel though differently spelled had sounded like its *oe*.

LIX

10. *Moire*, 'watered silk.' This is not the original meaning, which was that of the English 'mohair.' The word (sometimes spelt *mouaire*) and the thing are both said to have been borrowed from England in the seventeenth century: 'mohair' itself is the Arabic *mokkayyar*. However, Hatzfeld-Darmesteter quotes Chrestien de Troyes: 'Vestuz d'un drap de moire'—a solitary instance of the word, if it is the same word, in medieval literature.

12. *Ajustés*, 'close-fitting': what our modern dressmakers call *collants* as opposed to *bouffants*.

LX

This brilliant fantasy is an admirable example of Gautier's virtuosity. It professes to gather together the associations of a hackneyed melody: they are associations of a purely literary order, and depend entirely upon the *title*.

5. *Tabatières*, *i.e.* 'musical boxes.' For the parasitic *t*, compare *caoutchouté*, from *caoutchouc*, 'India-rubber'—where also the final *c* is silent.

9-16. *Poudreux berceaux* is an allusion to the love-bowers in the trees, the so-called *nids d'amoureux*, which have long been a special feature of the tea-gardens (*guinguettes*) in the suburbs of Paris, at Sceaux and Robinson notably.

11. *Commis*, a clerk or a shopman, is properly the past participle of *commettre*.

Grisette meant originally a plain grey or drap stuff, such as became the wives and daughters of sober citizens. Thence the word was used to signify such persons, and specialised by the Paris students, as a name for their sweethearts of the small burgess class and among the working-girls. The name, if not the thing, is almost extinct.

13. *Tonnelle*, 'arbour.'

14. *Chèvrefeuil*, *caprifolium* is an old, rare, and etymologically correct alternative form of *chèvrefeuille*, which is due to the influence of *feuille*.

15. *Ritournelle* : not (here) the sort of song specifically so called, because of its 'burden' or 'return,' in the later Middle Ages, but the 'symphony' of a song—the bars played by the instrument alone.

16. *Argenteuil* : the wine of that Parisian suburb, famous in the Middle Ages, and in our day less appreciated than its asparagus.

19. *Sébile* is a small, hollow, wooden tray. The origin of the word is doubtful.

23. *Glapissent*, 'yelp.'

25. Niccolò *Paganini*, the prince of violinists (1784-1840).

26. *Comme avec un crochet*, as a *chiffonnier* might pick up a treasure in a dust heap.

30. *Oripeau*, 'gold thread' and 'gold leaf,' made of polished brass. Figuratively it means 'tinsel,' 'dross.' The first part of the word is the old adjective *orie* (with the tonic accent on *o*), Latin *aureum*.

32. A visualist like Gautier, more inevitably even than other poets who have tried to interpret the effects of music with words, requisitions the plastic arts for analogies with sound. *Arabesques* has definitely musical associations for all who know their Schumann.

49-52. Here is another and more subtle analogy. The rotundity of a pure musical phrase is suggested by the sight of the cupolas ; and their form is that of a bosom laden with the music of a sigh. Such is the logic of the imagination.

53. *Esquif* was borrowed from the Italian *schifo*, of Germanic origin (compare the German *Schiff*, our 'ship') : Old French had *esquipe*.

71. *Rosse d'une note fantasque*, 'thrashes to an antic tone.' In Gautier's fancy, the music of the *Carnaval* evokes all the well-known figures of a Venetian masked ball, and with every note or every phrase one of them is resuscitated in an appropriate posture. *Rosser* came apparently from *rosse*, 'jade,' with the first meaning 'to scold.'

72. *Cassandre*, Cassandro, one of the traditional old men of Italian farce, along with Pantaloon and the Doctor (see below).

75. Nothing need be said of Pierrot, the whitewashed ingenuous clown of French pantomime. The name was long one of the approved names for the stage peasant—like Colin, Lucas, Gros-Jean or Gros-René. The pun on *blanche*, 'a minim,' is obvious.

77. *Le Docteur bolonais*, the scholar or the lawyer of Bologna, is another of the ridiculous old men of Italian farce. He first appeared in 1560, when

the *Bolognese* actor Lucio introduced him upon the stage. He is often found pleading, still oftener misquoting Latin. *Harlequin* (Arlecchino) is his servant, and cozens him; *Colombine*, his daughter, is always complaining of his parsimony. The Doctor appears in French farce as early as 1572. It is just possible that the principal features of the character were borrowed from some real scholar of Bologna University.

79. *Polichinelle*, our Punch, is the Neapolitan *Polecenella*, Tuscan *Pulcinella*, a personage of the popular farces in Naples who has travelled half over Europe since he entered France with the *marionnettes* in the seventeenth century. His nose is, of course, the great thing about him.

80. *Croche*, 'a quaver'; a semi-quaver is *une double croche*.

81. *Trivelin*, *Trivellino*, is another of the late Italian clowns, well known also to the French *théâtre forain* of the eighteenth century for which so many good poets, like Piron, often wrote.

83. *Scaramouche*, *Scaramuccio*, was always dressed in black.

86. *Domino* was originally the name for a priest's short cloak with a hood. No doubt it came from some pious formula.

99. *Gamme*, 'a scale.' The Greek gamma Γ was used once to designate the tonic.

113. *Chanterelle*, the highest (or E) string of the violin.

114. *Harmonica*, German *Harmonika*, means 'musical glasses.' But does Gautier mean this, and not rather (*sons*) *harmoniques*, which is what we call 'harmonics'?

LXI

An example of the French virtue of verbal economy. The lines have as much density as Juvenal's.

8. *Charlatans.* The word was borrowed from the Italian (*ciarlatano*, from *ciarlare*, 'to bawl').

9, 10. The *curiosa felicitas* of these lines will escape no one.

13, 14. A model of the gnomic style.

LXII

Facit indignatio versus. Occasional as this celebrated invective was in its origin, it will live as long as the language. The *breathless* quality of the rhythm is what has struck every reader.

14. That is, in the mouth of a swearing workman.

20. The *boulevard de Gand* was, under the restoration monarchy, a cant name given to the boulevard des Italiens. It recalled the flight of Lewis the Eighteenth to Ghent on Napoleon's return from Elba. The court of the King of France, during the Hundred Days, was 'la cour de Gand.'

21. *Mitraille* is a corruption of *mitaille*, from the old word *mite*, our 'mite,' which may be Germanic.

23. *Canaille* is the Italian *canaglia*, a lot of dogs. In modern use this substantive is both collective and common : 'the rabble' and 'a cad.'

24. *Ruaient*, one syllable.

32. *Blanc*, sc. *d'Espagne* or *de céruse* (carbonate of lead prepared for the complexion).

47. *Fille*, sc. *publique.*

52. Hyperbolical : at twenty Napoleon was still an obscure subaltern.

75. *Limon*, 'slime,' is the popular Latin *limonem* = *limum. Ordure* comes from the old adjective *ord*, which is the Latin *horridum.*

86. *Sanglier* is the Latin *singularem*, a word which (as it describes the animal's solitary habits) replaced *aper* in popular speech. It ought therefore to be spelt *senglier.*

92. *Meute*, 'a pack' of hounds, is the popular Latin *movita* (*movere*), and meant first a 'start,' then 'going a-hunting,' then the hunt itself.

94. *Mâtin* is *mansuetinum* [*masetino] = 'tame.'

97. *Cohue*, of unknown origin, meant once a market ; now a 'throng.' It is probably not *co-hue* ('cry').

99. *Dogues* is of course our English word : *molosse*, a variety of bull-dog, is the Greek μολοσσός (from the name of a people in Epirus).

108. *Soûl* (the *l* silent) is still often spelt *saoul* : it is *satullum*, 'full' (*satur*).

113. *Chenil.* Our 'kennel' preserves the Norman-Picard form, which characteristically keeps the hard *c* of the Latin *canile.*

LXIII

14. Titian died of the plague (*fléau*) in Venice at a patriarchal age (1477-1576).

LXIV

Whether Marie, the subject of a handful of idylls or episodes in the volume called after her name, was a real person is not quite certain, Brizeux's reserve being considerable. His brother thought she existed. For us at any rate she has the reality of an emblem : she is the Breton soul. All or nearly all the place-names in this piece belong to the south-west corner of the province.

9. *Men-hîr* means 'long stone' in Breton. The origin of the tall single stones which are found in Brittany and the west of England was long a vexed question of archaeology. They are certainly pre-Celtic.

23. *Au presbytère*, at the house of the priest of Arvannô, the Abbé Lenir, where Brizeux received his early education.

LXV

The form of this poem deserves notice : the lines of twelve syllables alternate with the lines of eight, but the rimes are disposed in triads—three feminine and three masculine lines alternately. It is, I think, an original and effective) scheme.

9. The line defines the poetic ideal of Brizeux admirably.

13. *Soc*, 'ploughshare,' is a Celtic word: 'sock' is used in certain parts of Great Britain.

14. *Pasteur*, which has here its figurative sense, is of course the learned form of *pâtre* which is the old subject-case (*pasteor*, *pâteur*, the object-case, has disappeared).

32. *Lande*, 'moor,' is the Celtic (Latinised) *landa*, 'a bare, open tract.' The Breton has *lann*.

LXVI

If the spirit of this gay and delicate piece recalls the famous *Pervigilium Veneris* of the later Roman literature—'Cras amet qui nunquam amavit quique amavit nunc amet,' its form is quite unique. It is almost a double sonnet and almost an inverted *villanelle*. Here is the scheme:—1 2 3 4, 4 5 6 7, 7 8 9 10, 1 4 7 10; then 10 11 7, 7 12 4, 4 13 1, 13 12 11. It has thus four quatrains followed by four triads; only thirteen different lines, and only two rimes; all the odd numbers rime together and all the even numbers rime together.

LXVII

In this long poem the rime is remarkably rich throughout; the rhythm solemn and, in its relative monotony, appropriate to the theme. Its pantheism is only apparent. The word *chêne* represents the Latinised form, *cascanum*, of a Gaulish original.

27. *Pervenche*, our 'periwinkle' ('dogbane' is the commoner name), is Pliny's *vinca pervinca*.

106. The oak is as much (though differently) a religious symbol for this Christian Gaul as it was for his ancestors in druidical times. But compare lines 137, 138.

107, 108. These two lines are monumental. The second has the *coupe ternaire* (3 + 5 + 4).

LXVIII

Watteau would have done justice to this charming procession of players (with the poet and the donkey in the rear) crossing a glade in all the glory of their parts.

6. This line ran originally:

Montrant son sein nu sous la broderie.

12. *Dame-jeanne*, 'demi-john,' a glass bottle with a big body and a little neck, generally enclosed in wickerwork. It has nothing to do with the proper name *Jeanne*, nor (as has been suggested) is the word a corruption of the Persian Damaghan, the name of a town famous for its glassworks. It is really nothing but the Provençal *damajano*, which is for *de mejano*, 'of middling (size).'

LXIX

The poem, inspired by an old popular burden, has only two rimes. Notice that *voient* (line 3) is a monosyllable.

LXX

This Ballade illustrates at once Banville's skill in one of those traditional forms he loved, and his loyal admiration for his master. *L'île* of course is Guernsey. It is hardly necessary to give the scheme: it is enough to say that in each of the three strophes of eight lines there are the same three rimes, crossed thus *ababbcbc*: the last line being exactly repeated at the end of each strophe, as well as at the end of the half-strophe called L'Envoi which traditionally (Banville eludes and suggests the tradition neatly) begins with: *Prince!*—This is a 'single' ballade in octosyllables. There is also the 'double ballade,' in decasyllables of which each strophe rimes thus *ababbccdcd*, thus introducing a fourth rime. The *Envoi* has five lines, *ccdcd*. The French ballade dates in this form from the fourteenth century. There is little doubt that its original was the ancient dancing song called *ballette* (which was in all probability an import from Provence): the ballette had also three strophes and refrains, but the arrangement of rimes was not uniform.

5. *Voyron*, in Dauphiny, near the Grande-Chartreuse, has important cloth factories.

6. *Auch* is in Languedoc, *Nuits* in Burgundy, *Gap* in Dauphiny, and *Lille* in French Flanders. No eminent poet of Banville's time came from any of these towns.

9. Parnassus, of course.

12. *Oiseliers*, *i.e.* like people who train humming-birds.

14. *Delille* (1738-1813), the laureate of the classical decadence.

19, 20. The description might (but for the date) have been meant for M. Richepin.

22. Whether the *grand cri* of the *Marseillaise* is really Rouget de L'Isle's is still disputed. There is a well-known story that in his later years, he enjoyed asking young admirers which strophe of the great hymn they preferred. Naturally it was always 'Nous entrerons dans la carrière. . . .' 'Eh bien! celle-là, malheureusement, *n'est pas de moi*!'

LXXI

The Oriental poem called *pantoum* was first heard of in France when Victor Hugo gave a prose translation of a *pantoum malais* (by his friend Ernest Fouinet) in the notes to *Les Orientales*. Its structure is described in the chapter on poetical curiosities in Banville's *Petit Traité*, and this poem is given there as an example. The pantoum is written in quatrains: the second line of each becomes the first of the next quatrain, the fourth line of each is repeated in the third of the next, and the first line of the poem reappears as the last. Its peculiarity is that throughout two different motives are pursued, in the first two and in the last two lines of each quatrain respectively; but there should always be some mysterious

analogy between them. It would be surprising indeed that the symbolists had not been tempted by the opportunities which these conditions offer, if 'fixed forms' had ever had any attraction for them.

LXXII

This piece in its realism and its melancholy shows a side of Banville's talent that has perhaps been unduly neglected by his critics.

1, 2. *Fiacre—nacre*, a lax rime, common in many good poets but extremely rare with Banville. The first establishment for the hire of hackney carriages in Paris was set up in 1640 at the sign of Saint-Fiacre (Fiacrius or Fefrus, a hermit of Irish birth, who lived in the forest of Brie *c.* 650 A.D., and is the patron of gardeners).

12. *Équarrisseur*, a 'knacker' (who 'quarters' horses).

15. *Carcan* (literally an iron collar used as a punishment, and supposed to be the Germanic *querka*, 'neck') and *chahut* belong to the traditional vocabulary of Paris cabmen. Timmermans in *L'Argot parisien* says : '*Le Chahut* est *le cahot* qu'on leur fait subir (*sc.* aux chevaux) en les agitant avec violence.'

16. *Président* as a term of abuse has of course a political origin : I can only conjecture that *Gamahut* is a personage in some ephemeral farce.

LXXIII

Flaubert says of this poem : '*La Colombe* restera peut-être comme la profession de foi historique du xix^e^ siècle en matière religieuse.' It is at least the most sane, luminous and plastic expression of an attitude characteristic of the last age, and becoming rarer every day among cultivated Frenchmen. The reader will not fail to admire the amplitude, the colour and the rhythm of 'La Colombe' : especially admirable are lines 20, 51 and 56.

9. Julian, the Apostate, who nearly succeeded in restoring Paganism during his short reign (361-363 A.D.).

LXXV

A superb profession of impassibility in passionate verse. *Montreurs*, 'showmen,' 'bear-leaders.'

9. The emphasis is upon *muet, sans gloire.*

13. *Tréteau*, 'booth' (our 'trestle').

LXXVI

This poem is worth quoting as an example of Leconte de Lisle's lyrical talent in the narrow sense : it is often denied to him entirely ; and his preference, when he forsakes the Alexandrine and the epical-descriptive manner, for strophes which end in a sort of *ritournelle*, and for songs with a burden to them, is perhaps a sign—if other signs were wanting—of relative sterility in this vein.

LXXVII

6. *Claies*, (here) 'cheese-wattles.' *Éclisse* in line 18 has the same meaning. *Claie* is a word of Celtic origin, Latinised into *cleta*, whence the French descends directly.

LXXVIII

The singular perfection of this famous poem needs no commentary. Nowhere in literature perhaps have the sensations of livid heat, tropical stillness and silence (how far from Matthew Arnold's 'all the live murmur of a summer day'!) been so masterfully rendered.

LXXIX

14. A fine phrase to describe the shark.

18. *Les Trois Rois*, 'the Magi,' is an old popular name for the three bright stars we call the belt of Orion, and known to astronomers as δ, ε, ζ *Orionis*. In France they are more usually called 'le bâton de Jacob' or 'le râteau.' *Le Triangle*, the asterism *Triangula*; *Le Scorpion*, the eighth sign of the zodiac.

20. *L'Ourse*, the little Bear; *Septentrion*, 'Charles's Wain.'

27. *Son grêle pilote*, the pilot-fish which, as sailors imagine, guides the shark towards its prey.

28. *Aileron*, 'fin.'

29-36. Evolutionist morality.

LXXX

The great Siege inspired nothing, even in *L'Année Terrible*, more moving than this outburst of indignant patriotism, with its characteristic gesture of contemptuous and irreducible constancy.

13, 15. *Froides—roides*: a rime for the eye. Nobody *says* anything but *raide*, though *froède* (the old pronunciation) persists in *patois*. *Raide* or *roide*, by the way, is an instance in which the feminine form of an adjective has absorbed the masculine (*rigidum: reit, roit*).

29. *Décombre*, rarely used in the singular.

41. An allusion to the arms of Paris—a toiling ship, with the legend *Fluctuat nec mergitur*.

57. *Fauve* is connected with the Germanic *falw—*: modern German *falb*, our *fallow*. Applied to the colour of deer, etc., this adjective in the expression *bête fauve* has come to mean little more than 'wild.' It is also a substantive.

LXXXI

These stanzas were headed AU LECTEUR in the editions published during the poet's lifetime. They were first printed in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* (June 1855). Both rhythm and diction have the unchangeable quality of

a solemn epitaph: the conceptions and their intensely concrete expression are more than characteristic—quintessential. Most of the lines are regular, with a classical poise: line 13 is a fine example of *coupe ternaire* (3 + 5 + 4); and there are certain Alexandrines which flow without a break (lines 3, 4, 6, 17, 34): they are the most Baudelairian of all.

9-12. The allusion is of course to the Hermes Trismegistus of the alchemists. With the help of the Evil One our will all goes to smoke.

18. *Catin* was originally a proper name (= Catherine): cf. our 'Poll.'

22, 23. In Baudelaire's first edition, these lines ran somewhat differently:

> Dans nos cerveaux malsains, comme un million d'helminthes,
> Grouille, chante et ripaille un peuple de Démons.

Million would thus have had two syllables instead of three—of which there are other instances.

29. *Lice*, 'brach,' of unknown origin, is to be distinguished from *lice*, '(jousting-) list,' as well as from *lice*, 'a weaving frame,' which is the Latin *licia* (plural), and our 'lisse.'

34. '*Pousser* un geste' is not French, and this sort of zeugma (as grammarians would say) is more startling than happy. Originally the poet had written 'Quoiqu'il ne *fasse*. . . .'

37. How different is this sinister *Ennui*, the disease of an insatiable imagination, from the mere tedium—a sign of low vitality—which has been too often called *la maladie du siècle*! The word—our 'annoy'—is the verbal substantive of *ennuyer*, which is the popular Latin *inodiare* (*odium*).

LXXXII

Baudelaire, the complex, the ultra-modern poet, slakes his thirst for the ancient ideals of formal beauty in this poem. The mood is not affected: there is a classical side to the character of his intellect if not of his imagination. Perhaps all moderns, when they turn with disgust from the less simple conception of human beauty, of which sadness, unrest, mystery and sacrifice are essential elements, necessarily exaggerate the serene and candid uselessness of pagan art. Sterility at least can have formed no part of the Greek ideal.

6. *Machine.* Wordsworth in a celebrated poem somewhat unhappily applies the expression 'The very pulse of the machine.' The word, in French, shocks no one: the eighteenth century had so long used it emphatically for the body, as the servant of the soul.

27, 28. *Hérédité—fécondité.* Baudelaire, a master of striking rimes and concrete language, is fond of obtaining a particular effect by occasionally coupling abstract words with an identical termination. The poets of the classical decadence did the same thing continually, but they did it without thinking, out of sheer exhaustion.

LXXXIII

There is a remarkable affinity between the impressions evoked in this sonnet and some of those recorded by R. L. Stevenson in that posthumous masterpiece *In the South Seas*. It is a commonplace that the sense of smell is the most powerful stimulant to memory; but no doubt the poet's imagination colours his verse more vividly than any recollections of his voyage to the Tropics. 'Symbolism' aspires to use words just as Baudelaire used a perfume—to suggest moods: but (though elsewhere he anticipates the symbolists) his method in this piece is the direct notation of sensations. The distinction of the epithet *monotone* in line 4, and the extreme beauty of

des femmes dont l'œil par sa franchise étonne . . .
Encor tout fatigués par la vague marine . . .

will not be lost upon the reader. 'Vague marine' recalls the sixteenth century. The sonnet was evidently inspired by Jeanne Duval, the mulatto mistress of the poet.

LXXXIV

Death and the horrors of its bodily aspect always preoccupied Baudelaire. Apart from its intensity of colouring, this famous poem owes its beauty to the magnificent conception of remembrance conquering corruption. It bears a superficial similarity to one of the best-known *Orientales*, 'Les Tronçons du Serpent' (as to the measure, Baudelaire's short lines have two syllables more than those of Hugo): but unquestionably the younger poet has done a finer thing. It is terribly sincere.

3. The word *charogne* is the popular Latin *caronia* (*caro*): *carogne*, whence our 'carrion' comes directly, is the Norman-Picard form: it subsists as a term of abuse.

25. Was Verlaine, in 'Marco' (*Poèmes Saturniens*), unconsciously affected by this line when he wrote—

Sa robe *rendait d'étranges musiques*
Quand Marco passait?

29-32. This strophe needs to be read more than once before the singular felicity of the image can be appreciated.

48. *Amours*, the plural, is seldom masculine.

LXXXV

Addressed to Jeanne Duval. Never was sound more inseparable from sense than in this poem with its supple and buoyant rhythm.

5-9. Compare the description of Dalila in *Samson Agonistes*, ll. 710-721.

5-6. *Large—large*: the same word in form and by etymology, but there is a wide enough difference in sense to justify the rime.

10. It seems uncertain whether *se pavaner*, 'to strut,' was taken directly

from *pavonem*, 'a peacock' : *pavane*, the name of a stately sort of dance, is the Spanish *pavana*.

LXXXVI

4. *Chenille*, lit. 'little dog'—from the shape of the caterpillar's head.

6. A *coupe ternaire*, 'in ascending numbers,' 3 + 4 + 5.

16. *Flaire*. The word is the Latin *fragrare* : the interchange of *l* and *r* (*titulum*, *titre*) is not uncommon. Dialectically *flairer* still keeps the intransitive sense of 'to smell,' in which it has been replaced by the corrupt form *fleurer*.

26, 28. *Auberge—héberge*, perhaps a questionable rime. *Auberge*, the Provençal *aubergo*, is simply another form of the Old French *herberge*, *héberge* : Old High German *heri-berga*, 'army shelter.' *Héberge* here is in the subjunctive.

LXXXVII

The chapter on wine in *Les Paradis Artificiels* may be compared with this poem. The subject long haunted Baudelaire : he wrote some popular verses on 'Le vin des honnêtes gens,' to which Villiers de l'Isle-Adam supplied the music, and about 1853 began a play called *L'Ivrogne* which was never finished.

4. *La fibre = les nerfs*.

33. *Crapule*, the Latin *crapula*, 'surfeit,' means both drunkenness and a drunkard. Recently as a term of abuse it has almost lost its definite meaning.

48. *Enragé*. All the posthumous editions of *Les Fleurs du Mal* read *enrayé*. It has been pointed out—notably by the editor of *Le Tombeau de Charles Baudelaire*—that *enragé* is the word printed in the two editions given by the poet himself, and that *enrayé* gives exactly the opposite sense. *Enrayer* is to put spokes in a wheel (*raie*), and so to check, to put the brake on. The old reading is restored in this book : nevertheless I think there is something to be said for *enrayé* : the drunkard's body would stop the wheels.

LXXXVIII

The exact force of the ironical title 'La Béatrice' is not very plain. Presumably it is Jeanne Duval, again, who makes common cause with those who misunderstand the poet's sincerity.

16. *Grand' pitié*. *Grand* had originally—like Latin *grandis*—no separate form for the feminine, and there is no justification for the apostrophe in the survivals—*grand'mère*, *grand'tante*, *grand'rue*, *grand'messe*, *grand'faim*, *grand'soif*, *grand'peur*, *grand'pitié*.

18. *Artistement*. *Artiste* is an adjective as well as a substantive, and *artistique* is, at least as it is generally used, superfluous.

XCII

This early poem, it will be noticed, is an inverted sonnet : two triads followed by two quatrains. All the lines except the first have the *coupe*

médiane (5 + 5) which is relatively uncommon in decasyllables. Notable examples of Verlaine's internal rime occur in lines 3 and 8. The other rimes are all 'rich.'

1. *Ko-Hinnor*, 'Mountain of light,' the name of a famous jewel belonging to the English royal collection.

3. *Heliogabalus*, better Elagabalus (the name is said to be Al Gabal, 'the Mountain'), the Roman emperor of Syrian race whose short reign from 219 to 222 A.D., was a miracle of effeminacy and corruption, recorded by Dion and Herodian.

Sardanapalus, king of Assyria. Scientific history knows nothing of him; Greek legends attributed to his voluptuous indolence and misrule the revolt of several tributary peoples culminating in the siege and first destruction of Nineveh about the end of the eighth century B.C. The tradition of his spectacular suicide has been preserved for us in Byron's tragedy. For Villon this monarch was

> Sardana, le preux chevalier
> Qui conquist le regne de Cretes.

10. *Par* in the common pleonasm *par trop* is the Latin intensive *per* of *permagnus*, *peropportune*, *perficere*, etc. In Old French it is often a separable particle reinforcing adverbs like *molt*, *tant*, and then commonly precedes *aveir* and *estre*, as in *Roland*, 3331 : *de cels d'Arabe si grant force i par at* (that is, 'Il y a si (très-) grand nombre de ceux d'Arabie').

12. The very ancient word *lie* is almost certainly of Celtic origin, for there is *lige* = 'deposit' in Irish, and *leit* = 'mud' in Breton. Our 'lees' comes straight from French, no doubt. Another *lie* ('chère lie') is an adjective, Latin *laeta*.

13, 14. It is hardly necessary to say that these lines express contempt for mediocrity when presented as an absolute good. Beauty is a height inaccessible to the merely pretty, assonance (says the young Parnassian) is an imperfect substitute for rime; and caution is not the ideal quality of friendship.

XCIII

Few poems of Verlaine's have won such celebrity as this sonnet, which wants little commentary. It is full of technical interest. There is not even a simulation of the median caesura in

> pour elle seule ; et *les-moiteurs* de mon front blême,

and it is really absent in several other lines. The vigour and sobriety of line 12 contrast deliciously with the length and languor of the next, and the last of all is remarkable for the Racinian effect of its sibilants, and the audacious perfection of its unusual rhythm, 4 + 3 + 5, with a feminine ending carried over from the second group.

11. *Que la Vie exila* is obscure. Were the beloved banished by this life

from their home in heaven? or were they simply severed by its vicissitudes from their ideal loves? Perhaps this is only an instance in which the poet has said more than he means, and seems to mean even more than he has said.

14. 'Quand on écoute M. Verlaine, on désirerait qu'il n'eût jamais d'autre inflexion que celle-là,' said Barbey d'Aurevilly in his unsympathetic review of *Poèmes Saturniens*.

XCIV

In this gentle allegory of penitence the rhythm is grave and sober throughout. The end is an example of Verlaine's characteristic *bonhomie* (there is no other word !).

XCV

It is difficult not to suppose that this beautiful sonnet—or at least its opening—was suggested by the famous apostrophe beginning

Chair de la femme ! argile idéale ! ô merveille !

in Victor Hugo's 'Sacre de la Femme' (*Légende des Siècles*, ii. 1). The median caesura is tolerably preserved in five of the lines : it disappears even for the eye in line 13. 'Matinal appel' (6-7) is *bad* overflow, for it might pass for a mere miscount.

1-8. Grammatically a series of interjections. As punctuated, the significance of *toujours* in line 5 is problematical.

8. A superb line :—'or splendid sob that dies in the fold of a shawl.'

11. Is there not a reminiscence of Hebrew poetry in the symbolic *montagne*?

14. No French (or English) poet has quite the quality of familiar candour expressed with all the graces of hesitation in this line.

XCVI

Here is a poem which may be described justly, for once, by the epithet *elusive*. It is pretty certain that he here addresses his wife, possibly from his prison, where he learned that she had obtained a judicial separation from him.

2. *Pleure—plaire*. Assonance is, strictly speaking, identity of vowel-sound followed by dissimilar consonants : here everything is identical except the (tonic) vowel. Internal rime, assonance and consonant-assonance are all frequent in this poet, more especially in *Romances sans Paroles*.

XCVII

2. *i.e.* toujours dressée sur ta tige, et triomphante.

3. *Le* Velasquez is a little affected ; the article is used in this way only before the names of a few of the earlier *Italian* poets and artists.

7. *Inutile trésor* is of course in apposition.

XCVIII

3. *Enchère*, 'bidding,' 'auction,' is the verbal substantive of *enchérir*, 'to raise the price.'

4. *Cochère* in *porte cochère*, 'carriage entrance,' is an adjective (only existing in the feminine form) from *coche*—our 'coach.' There is also a substantive *cochère*, of recent and facetious coinage, the feminine of *cocher*.

5. *Geindre*, Latin *gemere*. The old form was *giembre* : *d* was substituted for *b* (as in *empreindre*) through the influence of such verbs as *éteindre*, *poindre*. The other form of the same verb *gémir*, in which the conjugation is changed, dates from the thirteenth century.

XCIX

Though this celebrated sonnet is perfect throughout, lesser beauties are all forgotten when we have reached its splendid climax—all the shame of Actium in Cleopatra's eyes. There are two sonnets on Cleopatra, only less fine than this, by Albert Samain (*Au Jardin de l'Infante*, pp. 107, 108).

C

1. *Encourtiné* smacks of the Pléiade, but it is as old as the twelfth century.

6. *Bénit*, for *béni*, is a form confined to pious objects (*pain bénit, eau bénite*).

10. The rhythm is superb : yet such a *coupe* as 5 + 2 + 5 (or 7 + 5) rarely satisfies the ear.

11. *Brut*, 'unhewn.'

CI

This poem is relatively limpid.—The windows, through which the dying patient catches a glimpse of day and a vision of golden galleys in the sunset among the tiles, are the means—art or mysticism—by which the poet, turning his back on the hideousness of reality, sees a lost heaven of ideal beauty.

10, 11. *Telle . . . jadis!* This is all parenthetical.

13. Extreme Unction.

20. A very beautiful line which, however, recalls Baudelaire's 'O parfum *chargé de nonchaloir*' ('La Chevelure'). Modern poets have revived the old word so dear to Charles d'Orléans, but *nonchalance* is the ordinary form. The impersonal verb *chaloir* (*calere*) 'to trouble' has virtually disappeared.

38. An inversion.

CII

M. Albert Mockel has thus interpreted (if that is the word) the sense of this difficult sonnet :

. . . Nous y voyons apparaître l'image d'un cygne captif dans un étang glacé, celle d'un cygne qui se débat, celle (par allusion) de l'oiseau qui dévore l'espace, et celle du blanc désert de la neige. J'y vois la conception platonicienne de l'âme déchue de l'idéal, et qui y aspire comme à sa patrie natale ;

et celle que le génie est un isolement de par son aristocratie. Il nous suggère aussi la misère du poète, ici exilé,—jadis il eût été prophète,—et qui survit à son moment. Et la conclusion stoïcienne: vaincre par le mépris le malheur, en gardant haut la tête. Enfin, on en peut faire des adaptations morales assez diverses,—celle-ci, par exemple, qui fut, je crois, dans la pensée de l'auteur: l'homme supérieur, s'il succombe à la vie quotidienne, est la victime de son antérieure indifférence, *pour n'avoir pas chanté la région où vivre*, pour n'avoir pas secoué à temps les préjugés qui l'étreignent à present, captif malgré son indignation.

(*Un Héros.*)

CIII

There are many pearls in *La Mer*, but as a rule you must dive into slime to find them. The best poems, such as 'La Vieille,' are incredibly coarse in places. This sonnet may give an insufficient, but still some notion of M. Richepin's violent imagination and of his virtuosity. The last six lines are especially characteristic.

10. *En*, sc. *de ce manteau* (*l'Océan*).

12. *Ourlet*, 'hem,' is a diminutive of the Old French *ourle*, Latin *orulum* (classical *ora*), of which another form, *orle*, survives as a term of heraldry and architecture. *Pagne*, a nigger's loin-cloth, is the Spanish paño.

CIV

All the rimes are masculine.

17. *Barbon*, 'grey-beard'—though there is nothing to imply *grey* in the word.

22. French slang says: 'Je ne crache pas dessus,' just as ours says: 'It is not to be sneezed at.' The adverb *dessus* takes the place of *sur* with a personal pronoun, at least if it refers to an inanimate object.

CV

This feverish poem, of which the gist is a warning of inutility, of sedentariness, is of course a sick man's vision. There is extraordinary condensation in the language. The rhythm is restless and vehement, but the form is almost regular, apart from the matter of caesura.

2, 3. The median caesura is virtually absent in both these lines.

6. No median caesura here, nor in line 19.

10. The sixth syllable is atonic (feminine *e*).

17. *Éclatants et claquants:* Verhaeren uses every sort of alliteration.

20. The median caesura is again virtually wanting. It is a vivid phrase for the vanity of scholasticism: futile problems, which resist the keen edge of the intellect as a blanket might blunt an axe.

21. *Les naguères*—the yesterdays of youth. The word is used as a substantive, but the *s* must not be taken for a sign of the plural. It is an alternative form (so also *guère* or *guères*).

CVI

The last lines make the sense of this allegory sufficiently plain: the Sirens are ideals, visions of art, or perhaps creeds.—The feminine *e* counts everywhere here, but there are a few final words left without a rime (at lines 3, 4, 24), and some false rimes if we look to their spelling. Though it is only the logic of the narrative that dictates the variety of measures and the arrangement of the lines in *laisses*, the impression of unity is complete.

29, 30. A fine image.

40. *Qui enchantaient*—hiatus.

CVII

Another allegory—but eloquent and impassioned; a flaming vision of universal hucksterdom, trafficking in faith, love, science and the sweat of great men's brows, 'the molten diamonds of the dew.'—All that was said of the form of the last poem is true of this: it would be tedious to point out all the irregularities.

2. *Éventaires* are hawkers' trays—so called because they are exposed to the air. *Ventrus* is a perfect epithet for them.

3. Internal rime—*ris-dis*, *rus-rus*. *Bourru* comes from *bourre*, coarse wool.

5. Internal rime again.

13. A line of fourteen syllables, for I assume *pureté* scans *pur'té*.

20. *Tympans*, 'pediments.'

22. *Clowns*: this English word was once the French *colon* (*i.e.* 'a *country* clown').

25. Waggons, carriers' carts and low-wheeled drays.

44. *Camelots*, 'street-hawkers.' The word originally meant a coarse sort of cloth; it is evidently connected with *chameau*. What a *camelot* sells is *camelote*, 'shoddy.' The pedigree of *voyou*, 'rough,' has not been traced.

45, 46. *Armoires dérisoires*: internal rime.

47, 48. Victor Hugo called popularity 'la gloire en gros sous.'

61. *Expertiser* is to value, 'appraise.'

76. This is positivism.

85. Internal rime.

CVIII

A profession of faith, and also an *exegi monumentum*. Few poems of Verhaeren are so harmonious as this.

9-12. This might be Walt Whitman.

27. *Liens*, a monosyllable: by the rules it should be *li-ens*.

30, 31. *Tiré—vrai*, a defective rime; for *vrai* is *vrê* (open *è*).

CIX

2. *Lisweghe* or *Lisseweghe*, now a village but once a considerable industrial

town, lies a little South-eastwards inland from the fashionable Blankenberghe, whence its truncated tower may be plainly seen.

Furnes (Veurne), near the sea and the French frontier and about fifteen miles from Dunkirk, though fallen from its old estate, is a town still worth visiting for its churches of S. Walburga and S. Nicholas (with a great square tower), its Town-Hall and monuments of the Spanish occupation; but it is best known for the religious procession which for the last two hundred and fifty years and more has taken place there annually on the last Sunday in July. A very ingenuous Mystery-play is a part of this festival. The procession is joined, it is said, by many illustrious penitents. Furnes was taken by the troops of Philip the Fair in 1297 after a victory over the Count of Flanders.

72. *Nieuport*, on the Yser, was once a fortress which stood many sieges—notably in 1383, 1488, and 1792. Its lighthouse dates from the late thirteenth century. A mile and a half away lies the new watering-place of Nieuport-Bains. Turenne's victory over Condé and the Spaniards (la bataille des Dunes) was won near here in 1668.

CX

In manner and matter this elegy is very palpably modelled on a famous *double ballade* of Villon's (*Grant testament*, after strophe LIV.): how far it is merely a *pastiche* the reader may judge by a few lines transcribed from the old poem:

Folles amours font les gens bestes.
Salmon en idolatrya;
Samson en perdit ses lunettes . . .
Bien heureux est qui rien n'y a!

Orpheus, le doux menestrier,
Jouant de flustes et musettes,
En fut en dangier du meurtrier
Bon chien Cerberus à troys testes;
Et Narcissus, le bel honnestes,
En ung profond puys se noya
Pour l'amour de ses amourettes . . .
Bien heureux est qui rien n'y a!

The imitation is at any rate very charming, excellently rimed; and, by the way, M. Moréas has not admitted a word which was not French in the fifteenth century. The style will not however give any one much trouble. The form is *terza rima*.

1. *Turquois* for *turc*: 'veys Cupido tenant son arc turquoys' says a poet much older than Villon.
5. *Diffame* = *diffamation*.
8. *Augure*, *i.e.* prophet.
9. *Piteux* for *piteusement*.

11. *Lacs* (pronounced *lâ*) is the popular Latin *lacius* for *laqueus*, and means 'snare.'

12. *Mal'mort*, *malam mortem.*

13. *Soulas*, 'comfort' (*solatium*).

17. *La lydienne*, Omphale. *Herculus* for *Hercule* is characteristically medieval.

18. *Aime-laine*: this sort of compound was coined every day by the Renaissance poets—scarcely earlier.

19. *Stratonice*, the daughter of Demetrius Poliorcetes.

21. *Chryséide*, Chryseis, the Cressida of Shakespeare.

23. *Buccins*, for 'bugles,' is perhaps an exception to what was said above of M. Moréas' vocabulary. The word is now the name of a mollusk; the right form would be *buisines*, the Latin for 'bugle' being *buccina*, not *buccinum.*

24. This means, I imagine, a man of too great valour for discretion. *Trop plus* was a frequent collocation. *Preux* (*preus*, *preuz* in Old French) is apparently the old subject-case of *preu*, the popular Latin *prodem*, supposed to be connected with the *prod-* of *prodesse*. *Prodem* never had a nominative. Another *preu* meant 'gain, profit.' *Prud'homme* (which now means an arbitrator) is *prodem hominem*. *Prude* is for *pru de* (*femme*). Cf. *prou*, and *prouesse.*

25. i.e. *docte en tout*, *sauf en nonchaloir.*

27. *Ord* is an old adjective, 'filthy, smirched,' the Latin *horridum.* Thence comes *ordure.*

28. *Baillie* has disappeared in favour of *bailliage*, 'bailiwick.' *Bailli*, our 'bailiff,' was the participle of the old verb *baillir*, *bailler* in its modern form. It represents the Latin *bajulare*, 'to carry,' and meant once both to have in charge and to *give* in charge. *Bailli'* for *baillie* savours rather of Ronsard's scrupulous orthography than of Villon, who would have left, and not counted, the *e.*

31. *Cuide*, 'think' (*cogitare*).

34. *Clamer*, an old verb, has been revived quite recently.

CXI

This is not 'art for art's sake,' but other people's lives for the sake of my poetry. It is the measure of Ronsard's

> Plus estroit que la vigne à l'ormeau se marie
> De bras souplement forts—

and of Malherbe's *Consolation à Du Perrier.* The next piece, CXII., is in Chénier's and Barbier's measure (*iambes*).

CXIII

This bitter little poem rimes excellently for the ear, though it breaks several rules, singulars especially being coupled with plurals half-a-dozen times or more.

3. *Fossoyeux*, dialectical for *fossoyeur*. It rimes perfectly with *Messieurs*, the *r* being always silent.

6, 7. *C'est . . . ça.* In French a good deal of irony can be conveyed by the neuter pronoun applied to persons.

9. *Bock* is now understood as a term of measure, equivalent to *quart de litre* (nearly half a pint). The word is German, our 'buck,' and was really only the trade-mark of a particular brewery. In French the word dates from the introduction of German beer at the first Paris Exhibition in 1855.

10. *Soldez*, 'settle up,' as one might a bill.

27, 28. *i.e.* The dues of the dead figure in an account-book between two items: 'To cost of dance.' *Entretien tombe et messe* is a realistic abbreviation: you must understand 'pour l'entretien de la tombe et pour faire dire des messes à leur intention.'

CXIV

This colloquy is perplexing by reason of its excessive condensation. I venture to offer a paraphrase, without being quite confident that I have read Laforgue aright.

You say 'live your life.' I would live mine, but really the Ideal is too indefinite and too variable.—The word itself would be meaningless if the Ideal were the logical !—Well, but everything is in dispute. Philosophies are born and die, and no one can say why.—Of course ! in the real world, where life is the only truth, the absolute truth of some other sphere has no more rights.—Suppose, in despair, I lower my flag and ferry my spirit across to Nothingness ?—The voice of Infinitude warns you not to play the fool.—Yet what is beyond our conception seems near enough to the harbour of possibility—at any rate we shout as if they could hear us there !—It is only a step: how many such steps there are between dawn and twilight.—Tell me this, at all events: does being *real* mean being good for *something in particular* ?—That follows, doesn't it ? The rose is necessary—to its own needs. —In other words (you put the thing queerly), the Universe is so many vicious circles ?—Vicious if you like: as it is the Universe, there is nothing outside them.—All things considered, I prefer to take the Moon for my gospel.

(All through the collection to which this piece belongs, the Moon symbolises the Serenely Absurd; it is the sphere where problems are of no account.)

The *rimes embrassées* of this strange piece all satisfy the ear.

6. That is, one book brings another to the birth; a new book kills the doctrine of the last.

CXV

M. de Régnier has a power of vision, a lucidity (when he likes), and a suppleness of rhythm apt, as here, to convey the very sensations of speed, which often remind his readers of Hugo. The great poet might almost have written 'Apparition'—but for some of the rimes. It is otherwise regular.

5, 6. *Autre—haute*, a delicate assonance. Notice that four feminine endings are followed by four masculine ones (lines 3-6, 7-10).

10, 11. *En un bruit de vent*—a very bold overflow.

11. *Bave* is apparently an 'echoic' (or onomatopœic) word. It is of the same family as *babil*, *babillard*, etc.

15-18. Twice running, singular and plural terminations are coupled, defying the rule but not offending the ear.

CXVI

It would be tiresome to call attention to all the instances, in this and other poems of our contemporaries, in which the old rules of rime—those at least which make the eye its judge—are set at nought. The variety of measures is by no means infelicitous, nor (as so often) a mere matter of printing. The theme is old, but the tone new and very engaging. The lines scan thus: 8 2 4 4 12 10 3—4 8 8 3 4 12 4 8 8 3—2 9 3 3 8 8 8 8 8 8 8.

5, 6. *Enivre—rire*: assonance.

15, 17. *Tiède—lèvres*: assonance.

16. An octosyllable—the last syllable of *une* evidently does not count.

19. *Bure* (*burra*), 'drugget'; whence *bureau*, originally a table-cloth of coarse material. Possibly this line is intended for an octosyllable (*et d'laine*), but I do not think so.

25, 28. *Éclose—pauvre*: assonance.

CXVII

1, 3. *Pensive—indécise*: assonance. Otherwise all the rimes perfectly satisfy the ear.

CXIX

Fresh, sunny, tuneful and a little sad, this roundelay of happy girlhood going forth with laughter and prattle to meet each season of the year, is one of the best things done in a new manner by contemporary poets in France. There is no question of scanning the lines: each strophe is a whole, and within each strophe the ear quickly accepts a typical measure and, by dragging or hurrying the rhythm in each line, makes them all conform to it. The rimes are, almost without exception, perfect for the ear.

1. *Bise*, the winter wind; *brise*, 'breeze.' Both are of unknown origin.

2. *Chante—branche*: assonance; *clair—noires*: consonant-assonance.

4. *Heurtoir* is old-fashioned for *marteau*, 'door-knocker.'

13. *Sans se le dire*, 'unconsciously.'

25. Internal rime, as also in line 27.

26, 28. *Regret* (*è*): *pieds* (*yé*)—a defective rime.

28. *Dort—morte*: assonance.

CXXI

I have respected M. Kahn's habit of beginning his lines with a small letter, because it is part of his theory, which considers the unit of thought

and feeling rather than the unit of measure. It is useless to count the syllables in his lines: it must be allowed that in this poem at least a rhythm imposes itself on our ears. Rime, internal rime, assonance, alliteration of all kinds link line to line within the *laisses* or musical phrases.—Emotionally, the song is not without beauty.

3. *Épouses—s'entr'ouvrent*: internal assonance; and there is a complex interplay of *r* and *l* in this and the next two lines.

5. An obscure line: apparently the meaning is: '[neither your viziers' wives nor your barbarian captives] have souls to reveal to you rich as mine is with the memory of so many ideal lovers.' But *inconnus*, after all, may mean no more than usual—strangers.

11. *Rêve—lèvres*: assonance.

12. *Être—fête*: assonance.

13. *Lèvres—escorte—décors—rêve* might be called *assonances embrassées*.

CXXII

The parable is plain: art, the supreme luxury, goes begging in our utilitarian age.

2. *Brocs* is pronounced *brô*.

4. *Le Compagnon du Tour de France* is the title of one of George Sand's 'social' novels, of which the hero, a brother (*compagnon*) of one of the guilds or crafts called Devoirs, travels the country on an evangelising mission.

7. *Et me versez*: this manner of speaking is quite obsolete—every one says *et versez-moi*, but it was the old rule with the second of two imperatives.

9. *Calfat*, 'caulker,' is a Provençal word of Arabic origin.

21. *Carton-pierre* is a mixture of paper-pulp and plaster.

24. 'We scrape the bottom of the trough and drink sour wine.' *Sur* is Germanic.

26. *Chanteau*, sc. *de pain*, 'cut loaf,' from *chant*, 'edge,' Latin *canthum* (*κανθός*, 'corner').

CXXIII

The rimes are thus disposed: a a a b, c c c b, d d d b, e e e b, f f f f. They are feminine in the first three lines of each strophe, all feminine in the last. The effect is singularly melodious.

CXXIV

A sonnet—with an additional line.

6. The sixth syllable is 'atonic.'

15. An idea which seems to have haunted Samain. Compare (*Au Jardin de l'Infante*, 'Soirs', p. 115):—

Quelque part une enfant très douce doit mourir.

CXXV

This splendid aspiration—to be a seer, a saint, a hero—is grammatically a series of interjections.

12, 13. Singular rimes with plural : otherwise this sonnet is quite regular (though the disposition of the rimes in the two triads does not follow the best models).

CXXVI

This sweet and subtle poem is to be compared, and contrasted, with Baudelaire's bitter invocation 'Le Crépuscule du Soir' in *Tableaux parisiens* :

Voici le soir charmant, ami du criminel.

2. An excusable inversion.

13. From the legend of S. Veronica came the old English word *vernicle*, which meant a handkerchief with the face of Our Lord as a pattern upon it.

14. *Suie* is a very old word of uncertain, but most probably Celtic, origin (cf. Irish *suthaige*, *suice*). The known Germanic forms, from one of which our *soot* (*sôt*) descends, would not account for the French.

16. *Pâques* is a plural, as is shown by such expressions as *Pâques fleuries* (Palm Sunday), and the article is elliptical : la (fête de) Pâques. The Latin is *Paschae*, but the Hebrew word it represents is singular in number. The form *Pâque* is used for the Jewish Passover.

19. *Anciens*, trisyllabic here, is a word of doubtful scansion, like *duel*, *hier*, and a few more. The *ie* has been more generally counted by modern poets as a diphthong, wrongly, according to the origin of the word (popular Latin *anteianum*, from *ante*).

CXXVII

It is hardly necessary to remind the reader that Lille is a vast manufacturing centre. The poem begins like a sonnet with its two quatrains, then come three triads each on a single rime.

13. *Esclandre* (*scandalum*) is almost obsolete, the learned form *scandale* having taken its place. The first *l* is parasitical (as in *enclume*) ; for the second compare *épître*, *chapitre*.

15 *Rouir*, 'to set' (flax, etc.), is here intransitive.

CXXVIII

The reader may restore if he likes the consecrated typography, and he will see that the scheme is : 10 a, 10 b, 10 a, 10 b (alternate masculine and feminine rime ; the old *coupe* 4 + 6) followed by the *refrain*, 6 c, 7 a, 6 c, 7 c. There are only three different rimes ; one of them is twice replaced by assonance : *fête-belle* ; *muettes-messe*. The verse is syllabic, but the feminine

e only counts where it would be pronounced ('troublent nos cœurs') except in two instances :—

> La cloche enfin tient nos langues muettes . . .
> Vive le gars et la fille et la fête . . .

Throughout the *ear*, not the eye, is the judge.

Hardly any words want explaining. *Gars*, now only a country word, is the old subject-case of *garçon* which, by the way, is a word of unknown origin, though it exists in other of Romance languages. *Cornettes* are a sort of large caps worn by nuns and peasants, and probably so-called because of the horn-like shape of the great bows which fasten them under the chin. *Itou* (*itout*, *etout*) means *aussi* : it is a common word in many parts of France. It is almost certainly *not* connected with *etiam* or *item*, but is another form of *iteu*, *itel*, an adverb but properly an adjective, in the subject-case *itels—hic talis*.

Tertous is for *trétous*, the old intensive form of *tous*.

CXXIX

Perhaps the most useful commentary on this delightful poem will be a conventional transcription of two paragraphs or strophes. The italics mark assonances and one internal rime : the rest are perfect rimes 'for the ear.'

> Cette clarté subite, oublié', me surprend,
> Plus glacé qu'un miroir. Quel éblouissement
> De prisme tournoyant vient envahir mon *être*? . . .
> Mes paupières se clos't dans le ravissement.
> Je vois en moi le Jour et ses heures de *fête* !
> Éblouissez mon âm', belles heures mêlées !
> Tantôt c'est une aurore en feu qui me *pénètre*,
> Un midi d'or traînant les violett's du couchant,
> Et tantôt c'est *l'azur* d'une aube dévoilée,
> Où la terre paraît, couronné' de *verdure*.
>
> Je bute dans les herb's, mes yeux s'ouvrent au *monde*.
> Je regarde les hêtr's et je les sens pleins *d'ombre*.
> O ce jour sous les arbr's où se plaint le zéphyr,
> Pourquoi si froidement me vient-il éclairer? . . .
> Je m'approche des hêtr's : je les ai vus frémir.
> Et voici qu'une feuill' se découpe *tremblante*
> Sur le ciel argenté,
> Que des milliers de feuill's se détachent du soir,
> Que des milliers de feuill's se découpent en noir,
> Par la brise agitées !
> Je les vois, une à une, et par branche, éclater
> Noires au ciel limpide, et je vois l'ombre *prendre*,
> Comme un feu dévorant, sur leur foule *parlante*.

CXXX

60. *Bruit*, the verb, has two syllables ; *bruit*, the substantive, has one.

CXXXII

Sully-Prudhomme has another conception of 'L'Habitude,' too different even to be called inferior :—

L'Habitude est une étrangère
Qui supplante en nous la raison :
C'est une ancienne ménagère
Qui s'installe dans la maison.

—(*La Vie Intérieure.*)

'C'est le sentiment de ceux qui n'en ont point,' says Mlle. de Lespinasse. Notice that the rimes are all feminine. M. Angellier accepts all the reasonable reforms (admitting hiatus, for instance).

The following remarks may be found useful by English readers who are quite ignorant of French prosody. How French verse is to be read cannot be taught by written words, but the rudiments of its mechanism may. Fuller information is accessible in a large choice of manuals and treatises, amongst others in—

Quicherat : *Traité de Versification française* (1850).
Tobler : *Le vers français, ancien et moderne* [French translation of the German work, *Vom französischen Versbau*] (1885).
Banville : *Petit traité de Poésie française* (1872).
L. E. Kastner : *A History of French Versification* (Oxford, 1903).
L. M. Brandin : *A Book of French Prosody* (1904).

The more philosophical (or speculative) *Traité général de Versification française* of Becq de Fouquières (1879), W. Ténint's *Prosodie de l'École moderne* (1844), Clair Tisseur's *Modestes observations sur l'art de versifier* (1893), are almost indispensable to those who are particularly interested in the Romantic handling of the Alexandrine ; and the prosodical disputes of our contemporaries are the subject of Sully-Prudhomme's short essay *Réflexions sur l'art des vers* (1892), and of a chapter on 'Le Vers libre' in M. Remy de Gourmont's admirable book *L'Esthétique de la Langue française.*

APPENDIX

SOME REMARKS UPON MEASURE, RIME, AND RHYTHM IN FRENCH VERSE

MEASURE

1. The measure of a line of French verse is determined by the number of syllables it contains: the measure of several lines is the same when the number of syllables in each is the same. All syllables within the body of a line being reputed equal, differences in value, whether of stress or of duration, cannot affect the measure.

In English verse identity of measure does not always depend upon the number of syllables: two lines may belong to the same type of verse, though one contain more syllables than the other, so long as there is no excess in the number of stresses—that is, of syllables which in ordinary speech we pronounce with greater energy.

2. In French verse syllables formed by the vowel called feminine *e*,[1] unless occurring at the end of a line, are counted, even when by the habits of modern pronunciation they are silent.

The feminine *e*, which was sounded in every case (though lightly) until the sixteenth century or even later, and is still sounded in the speech of Southern Frenchmen wherever it occurs, has now ceased in the pronunciation of good speakers to have any value for the ear except in certain specified cases, *e.g.* when it occurs in the initial syllable of a group of words, in enclitics of one syllable followed by a second syllable containing the same vowel, and when it is placed between two consonants and a third (being a mute). In reciting verse, though the feminine *e* is still sounded apart from such cases as these by

[1] It is less well but more commonly called *e* mute, a name which begs the question of its value.

certain speakers, the better practice is now to drop it altogether, and to make up the loss by the almost instinctive device of prolonging the preceding or other syllables in the line so that the duration of the whole remains unaffected.

Within the last twenty years there has arisen among the younger poets a movement against counting syllables which are not in fact pronounced. But the practice of the most revolutionary versifiers is, so far, too inconsistent for any alternative rule to be even stated.

A feminine *e* when followed immediately by another vowel is invariably *elided* (or cancelled), and a fresh syllable begins with the consonant which preceded it. Thus,

Le ciel à force d'ombre était comme aplani
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

is a line of twelve syllables: the seventh syllable is *bré*, the tenth is *ma*. Though there is now no real aspirate in French, the initial *h* in a considerable number of words, chiefly of Germanic origin, is a reputed consonant, and there can be no elision before it.

Cueillez la branche de houx.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

A feminine *e* at the end of a word, immediately preceded by a vowel, must be followed by a word beginning with a vowel, and therefore be elided, unless it occurs at the end of a line.

Cher Zachari(e), allez ; ne vous arrêtez pas.

But such a line as

Cher Zacharie, pars, et ne t'arrête pas

would be incorrect.

This rule dates only from the sixteenth century and was not invariably obeyed even in the seventeenth. Recent poets often break it, and it is probably doomed.

A feminine *e* immediately preceded by a vowel in the body of a word is not counted.

Effraient has two syllables, *voient* has one, *gaîté* (*gaieté*) has two, *remerciement* (*remercîment*) four.

3. A diphthong[1] is counted, by definition, as only one syllable. Changes in French pronunciation have in many cases turned two

[1] A diphthong is the combination of a semi-vowel with a pure or nasal vowel. It must never be confounded with a digraph, in which two letters represent one vowel, as *au*, *ei*, *ai*.

distinct and successive sounds into a diphthong, while in others a diphthong has been divided into two syllables. Prosody, in this as in other respects, is often more conservative than speech.

4. A line of French verse may have from one to thirteen syllables, or even more. The commoner measures are of three, four, five, six, seven, eight, ten and twelve syllables.

RIME

It is a fundamental law of French verse that every line must end in a syllable which the ear recognises as identical with the last syllable of one or several other lines, whether the vowel in this last syllable be followed by one or several consonants or be absolutely final. This identity constitutes rime, and the ear is in theory its judge; but rime is in fact complicated by the reminiscence of older pronunciations perpetuated by inconsistent spelling, so that in many cases even a perfect identity of sound is by tradition held inadequate, because the two syllables in question, being differently spelled, would once have been differently pronounced; while on the other hand identical spelling is sometimes allowed as a pretext for coupling sounds which do not now agree perfectly together. To make the ear invariably the sole arbiter of what is and what is not rime is the object of a reform which, though perhaps in the long run inevitable, has not yet been established by any constant practice.

At the same time there is a recent disposition to substitute an occasional assonance for rime. Assonance, or identity of vowel without identity of consonants, was used in early French narrative poetry, but from the thirteenth century onwards only survived in popular verse. Blank verse has also been used, but without success, at various periods, notably at the Renaissance. Occasional blank verses are to be met with in the writings of certain living poets.

1. In principle, a syllable containing any one of the fifteen French vowels cannot be said to rime with a syllable containing any other. The vowels are these (the symbols being those adopted by the 'Association phonétique internationale'):—

Pure Vowels		*Nasal Vowels*
a (mal)	ɑ (mâle)	ɑ̃ (ment)
e (mai)	ɛ (mais)	ɛ̃ (main)
o (maux)	ɔ (mode)	ɔ̃ (mont)
ø (meut)	œ (meule)	œ̃ (Meung)
i (mie)		*semi-vowels, i.e.* i, u, y combined with pure or nasal vowels to form diphthongs and sounded with little more vibration than consonants: j (miel), w (moi), ɥ (muids).
u (moule)		
y (mule)		

The coupling, however of ɑ and a is held tolerable by the example of the great modern poets; that of ɔ and o is now much rarer.[1]

In principle, a diphthong rimes only with a diphthong; but in all ages poets of repute have occasionally coupled diphthongs with pure or nasal vowels:[2] the practice is justifiable on the theory that the semi-vowel of a diphthong is really a consonant.

2. The last audible vowel of a line may be actually final or it may be followed only by a consonant or consonants, whether silent or pronounced: in either case the termination is called *masculine*. If on the contrary a feminine *e* follows the last audible vowel in a line, whether immediately or with the intervention of one or more consonants, the termination is called *feminine*. A masculine termination cannot be said to rime with a feminine one.

Whatever the value of a feminine *e* within the line, at the end it is neither audible nor counted: its value is illusory or becomes real only by a caprice of declamation. The French ear no longer recognises any difference between *vis* and *vice* or between *mal* and *malle* or between *vrai* and *vraie*. The natural distinction (recently proposed by M. de Gourmont) would be this: when the last sound is a vowel, the termination is masculine; when the last sound is a consonant the termination is feminine. But the few poets of our day who have repudiated the old rule are by no means consistent, nor perhaps is their authority sufficient for its repeal.

[1] Lâche: tache—couronne: trône. This sort of rime is sometimes condemned on the ground that one vowel is 'long' and the other 'short.' It is not a question of quantity, but of quality.

[2] They have avoided however coupling wa with a—roi: ingrat.

Hence the rime itself is called masculine or feminine, and in French verse the rimes must be of either kind alternately.

In other words, if a line have a masculine ending, the next must either rime with it, or must have a feminine termination belonging to a fresh rime. This rule, founded perhaps upon the original interdependence of lyrical poetry and music, but formulated at the Renaissance, no longer even secures the variety it aimed at. It is combated by both the more and the less advanced reformers, and is apparently doomed, at least as far as the longer measures are concerned.

3. Though the definition of rime requires the identity of any consonants pronounced after the riming vowel in a pair of lines, excellent poets have not infrequently coupled a word ending in an audible consonant with a word in which the final sound is a vowel, if that vowel were followed by a silent consonant which in the older pronunciation of the language would have sounded exactly like the audible consonant in its fellow.

Until the seventeenth century final *s* or *x* signifying a plural, or any other final consonant, though ordinarily silent, might be sounded for the sake of emphasis, or before a pause. Except in the South of France, this habit has disappeared (leaving certain traces in the alternative pronunciation of the word *tous* and of several numerals): but there is thus some historical justification for such rimes as *las : hélas !—Vénus : nus —bénit : zénith.* Less excusable is the class of defective rimes known as 'Norman,' in which the infinitive ending *-er* [e] is coupled with the open *e* [ɛ] and audible *r* of words like *cher, mer.*

Two words of which the last audible syllable is identical cannot be said to rime if one, and not the other, ends in the silent letters *-es* or *-ent*; and in a masculine rime, if the last vowel of one word is followed by silent *s*, *x* or *z*, the last vowel of the other word must also be followed by any one of these three letters, which are reputed equivalent.

A nasal vowel of course can only rime with a nasal, but it is indifferent whether the silent consonant which is part of its sign be *n* or *m*. Other silent consonants than these following the final vowel have no importance if the rime is otherwise good.

Banville and other precisians protest against this 'laxity,' but few good poets would reject such rimes as *tyran : différend*, or

even *nid : finit*, though most perhaps would hesitate to couple *tabac* with *combat*. The ear of course approves all these equally.

A silent consonant immediately preceding a final *s* is also immaterial to the rime.

Morts, remords, mors all rime perfectly together.

4. A rime which fulfils these conditions is a *sufficient* rime : a *rich* rime is one in which, besides, the required identity in sound is extended to the consonant or the vowel immediately preceding the last audible vowel. To admit only rich rimes, at least in words of more than one syllable, is a counsel of perfection.

This sound if a consonant is called *consonne d'appui*.

Rime words in French may be identical from the first sound to the last, *i.e. equivocal* rimes are perfectly admissible, on condition that the two words making one sound be absolutely distinct, not necessarily in their etymology, but in their meaning.

A rule formulated by Malherbe and incapable of rigorous statement, as it touches the *matter* of poetry, requires in addition that the two words which form a rime shall not be so closely related in meaning or in grammatical form as to exclude the element of surprise. The spirit of this rule forbids the poet to couple words which *suggest each other* too readily (*e.g. bonheur, malheur*), and also condemns a large class of too easy or too common rimes, which includes adverbs in *-ment*, substantives in *-ion*, participles in *-é* and many verbal terminations.

STRUCTURE

In a French poem as in an English one, the lines may be all of one measure, or different measures may be combined in a single poem. The lines may follow one another in riming pairs (which is the rule in dramatic poetry, and is most usual in narrative): the rimes are then called 'flat'—*rimes plates*;—or they may rime alternately—*rimes croisées*;—or a riming pair may be enclosed by two other lines which rime together, according to the formula *a b b a*, *rimes embrassées* or *enclavées*;—or these dispositions may be combined. In certain sorts of poem, called therefore *poèmes à forme fixe*, the arrangement of the rimes, the number of lines, their measure, one or several, and their grouping in strophes or stanzas, are settled by a rigid tradition and a special code.

For the construction of the Sonnet, the Ballade, the Villanelle, the Chant Royal, the Rondeau, the Triolet, the Virelai, the Sextine, the Ternaire, the reader will refer to the regular manuals.

Most French lyrical poetry is written in less settled forms—more or less consecrated by illustrious use—consisting in an unlimited number of strophes exactly repeated or diversified at regular periods. The variety of French lyrical strophes is considerable, and there is no formal limit to invention. A poem in which the divisions, the combinations of different measures and the disposition of the rimes are arbitrary—in other words, a poem unique in structure—is said to be written in *vers libres*.

In this sense the Fables of La Fontaine supply the most illustrious examples of *vers libres*; but the expression has been recently applied to verses which do not conform to the traditional prosody. Others, in which the spirit of old rules is respected but the rules themselves interpreted more liberally or so modified as to correspond more closely to the modern pronunciation of French, are often described as *vers libérés*—emancipated.

HIATUS

Hiatus, by which is understood the juxtaposition of a final vowel (not being feminine *e*) and an initial vowel, has in principle been forbidden in French verse for the last three centuries; but apart from the toleration of special cases—such as the phrase 'ça et là'—and occasional infringements by even famous poets, the rule has been observed inconsistently, or only 'for the eye.' Recently, the grounds of the prohibition have been questioned; many living poets disregard it entirely; and it is agreed that its statement at least needs revising in accordance with phonetic principles, which would distinguish between (1) a real breach of continuity, necessary to the enunciation of two succeeding vowels when both are identical or when the first is a nasal—but not always disagreeable to the ear; and (2) other cases, involving no such interruption, in which two vowels belonging to different words follow each other immediately.

It may be said that *hiatus* is offensive only when it occurs within a rhythmical group [v. *infra*], and not always then—if, for instance, the foregoing vowel belong to an enclitic or a word relatively unimportant, or if the vowels in collision form such

a combination as the ear is accustomed to accept in the body of single French words, especially a combination easily assimilated to a diphthong (i, u, y+vowel).

RHYTHM

In French verse Rhythm, or order in time, means a distribution of variable elements in a fixed period having for its object the gratification of the ear by a sense of change in uniformity.

1. The formation of these elements or groups of syllables depends upon grammatical or logical coherence in agreement with certain habits of the ear, or in other words upon meaning controlled by rhythmical tradition.

2. Their termination is marked by the incidence of *stress*, with either a prolongation of the vowel upon which it falls or a more or less appreciable interruption before the first syllable of the succeeding group.

Stress in French, though susceptible of varying degrees of intensity according to the natural sonority of the vowel which bears it, is normally less emphatic than the stress we place on a particular syllable of almost every English word. Etymologically, the last tonic vowel (*i.e.* the last vowel not being a feminine *e*) of every French word except enclitics of one syllable is capable of bearing a stress which represents the Latin accent. But the characteristic continuity of spoken French makes the phrase and not the word the real unit of speech, and tends to level in respect of intensity all the syllables within a group of words cohering by the sense, except that enclitic monosyllables are lighter than other tonic syllables, and syllables formed by a feminine *e* are lighter still. *It is the last syllable of a whole group which receives the stress.*

3. The number of groups thus constituted is not limited by any rule of prosody; nor in the case of lines having less than nine syllables is the number of syllables contained in each group prescribed. As regards the longer measures tradition, hardened into rule, long required that they should be divided into two primary elements of fixed proportions by a principal pause or interruption called (by false analogy with Latin verse) a caesura.

4. The syllable which immediately precedes the caesura receives a stress: it must therefore be the last *tonic* syllable of a group of words, or (in rare instances) of a single word which, being insulated and self-sufficient, is equivalent to a group; and it cannot belong to an enclitic or contain a feminine *e*. It may however be immediately followed, in the same word, by a final syllable containing a feminine *e*, which vowel must be elided by a following vowel, the caesura in this case marking not a rest—in the musical sense—but a pause.

In the older French poetry a feminine *e* ending a word which immediately preceded the caesura *was not counted* in the line.

A caesura is vitiated if the word which precedes it is connected by a close grammatical relation with what follows, or if it constitutes a dependent member of a phrase to be completed with words belonging to the succeeding group.

5. In the infrequent line of nine syllables the caesura occurs after the third, the fourth or the fifth syllable; in the decasyllable (originally the chief measure of epic poetry, and subsequently the favourite measure of fable and light satire) it occurs after the fourth, more rarely after the fifth or the sixth; in lines of eleven syllables, after the fifth.

Nine :—

Prends l'éloquence || et tors-lui le cou.
4 5

Ten :—

Maître Corbeau, || sur un arbre perché
4 6

N'est-ce point assez || d'aimer sa maîtresse ?
5 5

Eleven :—

Sur le vert coteau || peignant ses cheveux d'or
5 6

6. The *Alexandrine* of twelve syllables is by the classical rules of French versification (and possibly by a reminiscence of its origin as a reduplication of the ancient line of six syllables) divided by the caesura into two equal halves. The composition of either half line (or hemistich) is rarely indestructible, and the sense normally suggests or requires additional pauses. The subdivisions are in the discretion of poets, who have in general preferred such as the

ear could appreciate most readily. The commoner elements in either half-line are groups of *two, three* or *four* syllables. Thus :—

Je crains Dieu, | cher Abner, || et n'ai point | d'autre crainte.
3 3 3 3

Ses trois vaisseaux | en rade || avaient mis | voile bas.
4 2 3 3

J'évi|te d'être long, || et je deviens | obscur.
2 4 4 2

7. Lines occur not infrequently in the classical poets in which the subdivisions are more imperiously dictated by the sense than is the principal division: that is, the sense requires a pause at the sixth less evidently than at intermediate syllables :

Qu'est-ce donc? || Qu'avez-vous | qui vous puisse | émouvoir?

In rarer distributions, elements of *one* and of *five* syllables are found. A monosyllabic element immediately preceding or following the caesura has very commonly the effect of weakening it. The line

Et qu'enfin | sa candeur || seule | a fait tous ses vices
3 3 1 5

may be recited so as to emphasise the break between 'candeur' and 'seule'; but a more natural reading will sacrifice the pause at the expected place and thus prolong the rhythmical period :

Et qu'enfin | sa candeur ⁞ seule || a fait tous ses vices.

Occasionally the caesura was actually perfunctory, the sense barely tolerating and in no way requiring a suspension of the voice at the half-line. Examples of this, before the nineteenth century, are found chiefly in satire and in comic dialogue.

On m'avait fait venir ⁞ d'Amiens | pour être suisse
Et tel mot, | pour avoir ⁞ réjoui le lecteur

8. Such attenuations of the 'median' caesura prepared the French ear for the virtual abrogation of the rule which required it. Great as is the variety of rhythms which the classical Alexandrine furnished to Racine and some other poets of the seventeenth century, its limits appeared too narrow for the new rhetoric of the Romantic generation, who desired an instrument apt not only to express the most tumultuous moods and passions but to express them *realistically*.

In the early poetry of Victor Hugo and of Vigny (as indeed in certain of André Chénier's fragments) evidence of discontent with the

old immovable caesura appear in numerous Alexandrines of which the main division is more or less equivocal. The characteristic rhythms of the Romantic poets were very gradually and somewhat timidly evolved. Their common definition is that they substitute two principal pauses or interruptions, one occurring at any place in the first hemistich, the other at any place in the second, for the single caesura at the half-line and the two discretionary subdivisions of the classical system. The Romantic Alexandrine is thus *tripartite*. The following are examples of its commoner types :—

L'obscurité, les | cieux ⁞ brumeux, | les cieux vermeils.
4 4 4

Voilà l'hom|me. Qui donc ⁞ a dit : | l'homme est sublime ?
3 5 4

Le loup hur|le, le ver ⁞ man|ge. Rien ne répond.
3 4 5

L'inflexion | des voix ⁞ chè|res qui se sont tues.
4 3 5

Chair de la femme, | argile ⁞ idéale : | ô merveille !
4 5 3

Il est grand et blond ; | l'autre ⁞ est petit, | pâle et brun.
5 4 3

Des la | ves, sous l'écorce ⁞ affreu | se des basaltes.
2 6 4

It will appear from these examples (1) that the point of departure was a compression or rather a coalition, more or less demanded by considerations of syntax or of meaning, between two subdivisions of the classical scheme ; and (2) that the general effect of the Romantic rhythms is to diminish somewhat the absolute duration in time of the entire period filled by an Alexandrine.

9. Poets of the Romantic age (and notably Victor Hugo throughout his careeer) all but invariably preserved the *letter* of the old rule while so often rebelling against its spirit : that is, they were careful to keep the 'median' caesura 'for the eye' and to avoid placing a syllable naturally incapable of bearing a stress, as an enclitic or a feminine *e*, or a syllable actually incorporated or inseparably connected with a following word, at the place in the line where the old division would have fallen. On this account they have been blamed for timidity and superstition—with how much injustice has been indicated elsewhere (Introduction, p. 53).

Their successors have abandoned their scruples. There are in Leconte de Lisle, Banville, Baudelaire, Verlaine a certain number of

lines in which the illusion of a 'median' caesura is no longer sustained :—

La voici morte. Que l'abîme l'engloutisse !
O ma nuit claire ! O tes yeux dans mon clair de lune !
Serait-ce point quelque jugement sans merci ?

And finally, lines in which a polysyllable actually bestrides the place of the old caesura are relatively frequent in the poetry of to-day —even in that part of it which in most other respects clings to the traditions of French versification. One example will be enough :—

Celles qui furent familières, mes pensées.

It should be observed that the Romantic Alexandrine with its varieties and its extensions is still many times less often found in the works of the Romantic and later poets than the old classical line clearly and equally divided.

ENJAMBEMENT

The name *enjambement* is properly given to a protraction of the last rhythmical element in a line, and a consequent omission of the interval or breathing-space between one line and the next.

The unity of a line may be perfectly preserved, and its final element may constitute a real group separated by logic or syntax—and therefore by rhythm—from what is to follow, even though it leave the general sense incomplete in the case of a long periodical sentence. This kind of false *enjambement* was quite common in the classical French poets, though it is true that they were careful in tragedy (and generally whenever they used the Alexandrine in *rimes plates*) that the conclusion of a pair of lines should coincide with the end of a sentence. In the poetry of the nineteenth century 'periods of thought' do not necessarily correspond to any fixed rhythmical period—the line, the couplet or even the strophe. (It need hardly be repeated that the logical or syntactical elements of such a 'period of thought' *do* correspond to the variable rhythmical elements and indeed actually create the rhythm.)

The line being a unit, it follows that the end of a line must be also the end of a group or rhythmical element. Under the classical system *enjambement*, as defined, was forbidden, just as the 'median'

caesura was enjoined upon poets—in the interest of *measure*. In both cases the rule was relaxed by the Romantics as an obstacle to the free development of expression and as tending to rhythmical monotony; but as all good poets recognise the unity of measure which *enjambement* endangers as a paramount object, they have used this liberty with the utmost caution. In general it has been held that—

(1) *Enjambement* requires a reinforcement of *rime*, upon which alone devolves the function of marking the end of a line when the stopping-point is temporarily obliterated. Hence in part the Romantic dogma of 'rich rimes.'

(2) The mere overflow of a grammatical supplement—of one or two words necessary to complete a phrase—is to be discouraged as an awkwardness; and the sentence (divisible of course into smaller groups of syllables) should not be brought to a conclusion before the end of the second line. Otherwise the *enjambement* will have the effect of a mere arbitrary prolongation of the normal measure—be it Alexandrine or decasyllable or other—and its unity instead of being quickly restored will be compromised still more.

The following passages contain examples both of true and of false *enjambement*. In order to distinguish the true cases, the rhythmical groups astride between two lines are enclosed within square brackets.

Le moment vint; l'escadre appareilla; [les roues
Tournèrent;] par ce tas de voiles et de proues,
Dont l'âpre artillerie en vingt salves gronda,
L'infini se laissa violer. L' Armada,
Formidable, penchant, prête à cracher le soufre,
Les gueules des canons sur les gueules du gouffre,
Nageant, polype humain, sur l'abîme béant,
Et, comme un noir poisson dans un filet géant,
Prenant l'ouragan sombre en ses mille cordages,
S'ébranla . . .
Homme, l'Être doit être. Homme, il n'est pas possible
Que la flèche esprit vole et n'ait pas une cible.
Il ne se peut, si vain et si croulant [que soit
Ce monde] où l'on voit fuir tout ce qu'on aperçoit,
Il ne se peut, ô tombe! ô nuit! que la nature
Ne soit qu'une inutile et creuse couverture,
Que le fond soit de l'ombre aveugle, [que le bout
Soit le vide], et que Rien ait pour écorce Tout.

Enjambement and *rejet* are sometimes used as convertible terms. The latter comprehends any extension of a rhythmical element beyond a point fixed by rule or tradition—as the caesura; *enjambement*, which affects the end of a line only, is a particular case of *rejet*.

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